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MARTHA

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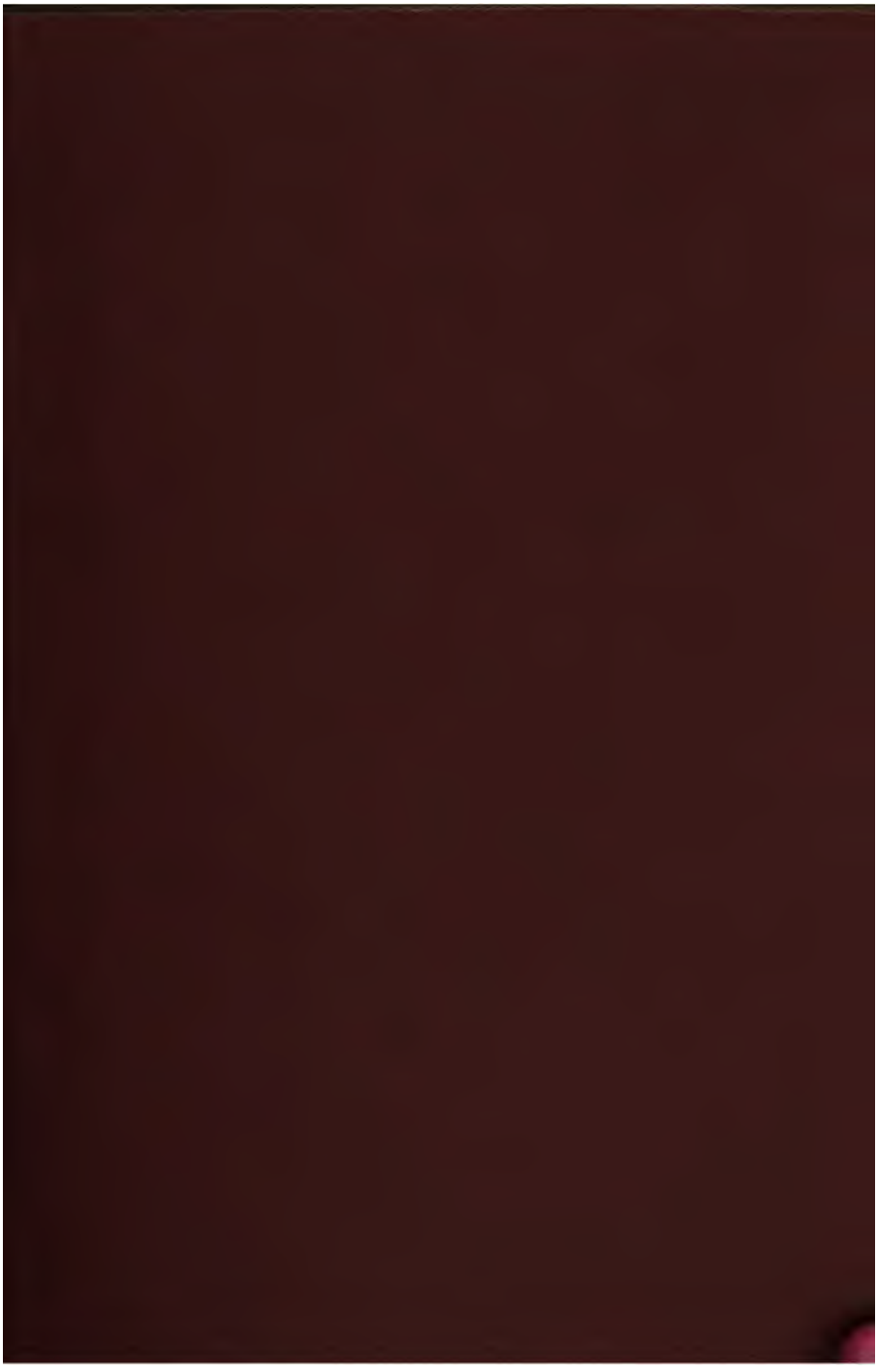

MARTHA.

BY

WILLIAM GILBERT,

AUTHOR OF

"LUCREZIA BORGIA," "SHIRLEY HALL ASYLUM,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MARTHA.

CHAPTER I.

'TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH.

TERRIBLE as had been the shock Martha experienced when she recognized the bloody and senseless form of her nephew Walter, after a few moments' stupor, the love she bore him partially recalled her to her senses. She first attempted, though ineffectually, to lift him up, and then rising on her knees and turning to the men who had gathered round her, she said angrily and impatiently to them, "Why don't you help me? why don't you do something? Lift him up, and do not stand idle there."

The lodge-keeper and the other two men, who had now somewhat recovered from the temporary bewilderment caused by the discovery, advanced, and stooping over the edge of the ditch, which crumbled beneath their

weight, with great difficulty removed the body from the position in which it was in, and placed it on the solid road. Martha then took the lantern from the hands of the man who held it (she had let the other fall into the water in her horror at seing her nephew in such a condition), and holding it to Walter's face, endeavoured to discover what injury he had received. One only was apparent, but that seemed of so serious a nature as alone to have caused death—a fearful wound on the side of the head. After uttering a sharp short cry of anguish, Martha endeavoured to ascertain whether there were any symptoms of life remaining, but none could she discover Holding up the lantern, she now looked anxiously in the faces of the men who stooped over the body, but no consolation could she find there. On the contrary, she saw on them as clearly written as the handwriting on the wall, though without any ambiguity of meaning—there is no hope, he is dead.

No sooner did Martha understand their thoughts than she let the lantern fall from her grasp; and placing her hands before her face, gave way to a perfectly silent, but uncontrolable, flood of tears. So profound was her anguish that the three men who were with her remained

inactive beside the body, as if unwilling to disturb her. For some minutes they continued silent, and then the lodge-keeper, unable longer to repress his sympathy, placed his hand gently on her shoulder, and said with great feeling in his tone, "Oh! don't take on so, ma'am; that won't do any good, you know. Come now, get up; and let us take the poor fellow back to the house."

So much kindness was in the man's voice, that it made some impression on Martha, great as was her sorrow, and she removed her hands from her face. The lodge-keeper, noticing the effect he had produced, now assisted her to rise, and then one of the men proposed that they should carry the body to the chaise, and having set it on its wheels, return altogether to the Red House.

They next lifted the body from the ground and carried it in their arms till they had reached the chaise, when John—a very powerful man—gave the bridle of the horse into the lodge-keeper's hands, and with great effort contrived to set the chaise on its wheels. Then fixing the rope he had brought with him round the axle of the carriage, and fastening the other end to the stirrup leather of the horse's saddle, they lifted the body

on the floor of the chaise. Martha having previously placed herself on one of the seats, took her nephew's head in her lap, and all being in readiness, they started for the Red House.

The lodge-keeper, as soon as they came near the house, ran on in advance; and having opened the gates in readiness for them to pass through, he proceeded to the hall door, where he found a footman standing on the step ready to convey to his mistress the first tidings of their return. After hastily telling the man what had occurred, the lodge-keeper was shown into the drawing-room, and there found Mrs. Thornbury in deep affliction, attended by her maid and the housekeeper. On seeing him enter she rose from her seat and attempted to speak, but she was unable to articulate, and the housekeeper, divining the wishes of her mistress, asked the man what news he had brought.

"Very bad indeed," was the reply, "only it isn't master, but Mr. Walter that's been killed."

The man's answer seemed to produce a singular effect on Mrs. Thornbury. On any other occasion the news of her nephew's death would have caused her the greatest affliction; in the present instance, it seemed to a certain extent to relieve her mind of a portion of the terrible

anxiety which had oppressed it. It was first shown by her now being able to ask the man some particulars of the sad intelligence he had brought. He had, however, barely time to inform her, when the sound of wheels was heard, and a moment afterwards Martha and the rest arrived at the house.

With great care the apparently lifeless body of Walter was brought into the drawing-room, and the group that gathered round it formed a most extraordinary scene. The appearance of those who had remained at home contrasted strangely with the mud-stained aspect of the two men who had entered (for John, as soon as they had reached home, had quitted the others to summon Dr. Wilson), bearing the pale blood-stained form of Walter, while Martha, who, with her garments saturated with rain, her hair in disorder, and the tears streaming down her face, seemed the embodiment of sorrow and desolation, as she stood beside the sofa on which her nephew had been placed. Mrs. Thornbury, assisted by the housekeeper, now showed she was not the apathetic woman those who knew her but superficially imagined her to be. With great readiness she ordered a room to be prepared for Walter, and a few minutes afterwards he was

carried into the one beside Martha's, and in which Charity had died. Mrs. Thornbury and Cooper insisted on Martha's changing her clothing. For some time she refused to follow their advice, but at last she placed herself in the hands of Cooper, and mechanically submitted to whatever she advised her to do. Then, returning to Walter's room and seating herself by the head of the bed, she remained in a half torpid, half sorrowful state till dawn, when Dr. Wilson arrived at the house.

An immediate change came over Martha as he entered the room. Rising from her chair, she advanced to meet him, and taking his hand said,

"Oh, how anxiously I have been awaiting your arrival! Do come and see if you can do anything for him."

The doctor approached the bed, and the moment his eye fell on Walter, a certain uplifting of his eyelids seemed to tell Martha that all was over. However, her fears had made her somewhat misunderstand him, for in answer to her exclamation, "Oh! you don't mean to say he is dead?" Dr. Wilson said,

"No, I do not mean to say so; on the contrary, I believe life to be still in him; but I shall

be better able to judge presently. Bring me a sponge and some warm water."

His orders were obeyed, and with the skill, lightness, and rapidity of an experienced surgeon, in a very short time he had not only sufficiently cleared the wound, so as to be able to judge of its extent and gravity, but had cleansed the face from the accumulation of blood and mud which disfigured it. After attentively examining his patient he said to Martha, "There is still life in him, and that is all I can say."

"You don't mean that there is no hope?" inquired Martha.

"I should be sorry to destroy your hopes by definitely saying there was not, or falsely to raise them by saying there was any certainty or even probability of his recovery. The wound he has received on the head is one of terrible severity. I do not think there is any fracture of the skull, nor can I detect any depression; at the same time, the wound is a very alarming one. Again, he may have received other injuries, even more than can for some time be detected."

"I hope," said Mrs. Thornbury, "you will not leave us till you are able to form a better judgment on his case."

"I will not do so till reaction has set in," was Dr. Wilson's reply; and he then commenced arranging the wound, and placing the proper bandages on the head, Walter the while showing no symptoms of returning consciousness.

After all was completed Dr. Wilson sat with them for some time longer, from time to time feeling his patient's pulse. At last it became perfectly distinguishable, and respiration, though laboured in the extreme, again commenced, but without the slightest return of consciousness. After remaining beside his patient for some hours, finding him still progressing, he said to Mrs. Thornbury,

"I must now leave you, as I have a very difficult case to see this morning, but I will return again about noon. In the meantime, keep the room darkened, and see that the strictest silence is maintained in the house."

Mrs. Thornbury promised that his instructions should be obeyed to the letter, and Dr. Wilson then left the room, she following him.

When they had arrived on the ground floor Mrs. Thornbury took the doctor into the parlour.

"I am afraid," she said to him, "that you think Walter is in a very dangerous condition?"

"He is indeed," said the doctor. "Still we

must hope for the best. He has youth and a good constitution in his favour, and he will also, I know, receive every care and attention here."

"You would greatly oblige me by calling on Mr. Keats and telling him what has occurred," said Mrs. Thornbury. "I will leave to your discretion whether you will confide it to him alone. Possibly it would be better to keep it from Fanny."

"I certainly would not let her know anything about it, at least for the present," said the doctor. "It would do her no good, and if she attempted to see your nephew it might do him great harm, especially if consciousness were about to return. As I told you upstairs, he must be kept perfectly quiet. Not a word should be spoken to him more than is absolutely necessary, till I give permission, and that, under the most favourable circumstances, will not be for some days to come. But now I must leave you. As soon as I have seen my patient I will call on Mr. Keats, and probably bring him back with me. Good-bye for the present."

About two hours after quitting the Red House, Dr. Wilson, having previously visited his other patient, called in the Close, and fortunately found Mr. Keats at home, and alone

in his study. He told Mr. Keats all that had occurred, who appeared overwhelmed at the intelligence.

"What ought I to do about Fanny?" he asked. "It will break the poor girl's heart when she hears of it."

"Keep it a secret from her, for the present at least," was the doctor's reply. "But now I want to speak to you on a very serious subject, which I did not like to mention to the family at the Red House, they are so overwhelmed with sorrow. I strongly suspect that the terrible wound he has on his head was not caused by accident. It appears too deep and incised to have been done by falling on the ground, which by-the-bye was exceedingly soft from the quantity of rain which had fallen, nor can I think it was caused by a blow of the pony's hoof."

"Has he been robbed?" inquired Mr. Keats. "Do you know if he has lost anything?"

"That question I cannot answer. I suspect he has, for on examining his clothes I did not perceive any watch. I do not know whether he had his purse, for I didn't like to ask any questions which might increase their sorrow, for heaven knows it is severe enough already. Would

you have any objection to come with me to the Inspector of Police and take his advice in the matter?"

"I decidedly think it the best thing we could do. We will go there at once and leave the matter in his hands. and then I should like to visit them at the Red House, and see if I can afford them any consolation or assistance."

Dr. Wilson said he would be doing a very kind action, and volunteered to take him in his brougham; and the offer being accepted, the two friends started off to the office of the Inspector of Police, Mr. Keats leaving word that probably he would not be home till evening.

On their way to the police station, Mr. Keats narrated to the doctor the particulars of Walter's visit the evening before. He had arrived by the train his uncle was to have come by, and, on reaching the Close and only finding Mrs. Keats and the daughters at home, had remained chatting with them till his (Mr. Keat's) return. Walter had told them that in consequence of some intelligence which had reached his uncle, he had postponed his voyage to India for another six weeks at the earliest, and that he had sent him to X—— to explain this to the Keats family. Walter had also been intrusted with

a message to Mr. Keats from his uncle, asking him to consent to the wedding taking place before his departure for Calcutta. Mrs. Keats readily promised to plead for him, and although Fanny said nothing, it was easy to perceive she would offer no very strong objection to the plan, while the other members of the family received the proposition with unqualified satisfaction, and implored their mother to omit no arguments on her part to get their father to give his consent. Another subject Walter had also spoken to them upon. His uncle had resolved to retire from business, and not only to make over his interest in the firm to his nephews, but also to make them his heirs, but the latter solely on condition that they dropped the name of Morecombe and assumed that of Thornbury. Of course Walter, who had but little remembrance of his father—and that little bearing with it no great respect for him—without hesitation accepted the terms, stating, from that day forward, he would always call himself by his uncle's name; "and so," said Walter laughing, "if your papa offers no objection, I shall put a fine on any one of you who in future calls me by the name of Morecombe. Already I have for several days past been making the clerks,

as well as my landlady in London, call me by my new name, and we are all getting as completely used to it as if I had been known by the name of Thornbury all my life."

"My wife," continued Mr. Keats, "having stated her opinion that I would offer no objection to the change of name, knowing my great respect for Mr. Thornbury, the whole family commenced, amidst much laughter, to practise it till my return home, when, to my great surprise, I found Walter in the house instead of his uncle, whom I had expected. On his telling me he wished to speak to me in private, I took him into my study, and he then gave me the messages his uncle had intrusted him with. I tell you candidly I made no objection to either. In the first place, I think the marriage as proposed, would conduce to my child's happiness, and as to the change of name I received the suggestion with great satisfaction. A more honourable man than Mr. Thornbury I do not know, and a more unmitigated villain than I understand Walter's father was, it would be difficult to meet with. In fact, I agreed to both the requests, and the poor fellow in a state of great happiness then joined the family and told them the result of our interview. He remained with us till ten

o'clock, and I then proposed walking with him to the 'White Hart,' where the pony chaise had been put up, but as we found it had began raining very heavily, and as he would not allow me to go with him, I bade him good night."

The doctor and Mr. Keats had now reached the Police Station. They described to the Inspector the business they had come on, and asked his advice in what manner to proceed. Before giving any direct reply, he minutely questioned Dr. Wilson on the points of the case which appeared obscure.

"You cannot tell whether the gentleman has been robbed?" he inquired.

"No, my only reasons for supposing it possible are that I do not see his watch, and that the wound on his head appears to have been inflicted by some edged instrument."

"He had no watch with him," put in Mr. Keats. "I now remember he told us that he had left it in London to be repaired."

"I am really unable to form any opinion at the moment," said the Inspector, "but it shall not be from want of exertion on my part, if I do not discover the whole truth of the matter. What did you say was the gentleman's name?"

"Walter More—Thornbury I mean," said Mr.

Keats, correcting himself. "He is a nephew of Mr. Thornbury of the Red House."

"Are you likely to see the gentleman again this afternoon?" inquired the Inspector.

"I am going to visit him now in company with Mr. Keats," said the doctor. "My brougham is waiting for me at my house."

"Would you have any objection to allow one of my men in plain clothes, whom I generally employ as a detective, to ride on the box with the coachman?"

"None whatever."

"Then I will tell him to go with you. I will follow on horseback in a few minutes, but I must first enter a note of the case in my book, and I have one or two things to attend to before I leave. I shall probably be at the Red House as soon as you will."

The Inspector then called one of his men, to whom he gave some instructions, and shortly afterwards Mr. Keats, and the doctor, with the detective, were on their road to the Red House.

When they reached the spot where Walter had been discovered the previous night, they found a man, whom both Mr. Keats and the doctor recognized as the lodge-keeper, apparently occupied in examining the spot. The

doctor immediately ordered the coachman to stop, and they both quitted the brougham to question the lodge-keeper as to what he knew of the occurrence; and shortly afterwards the detective, who had listened attentively to all that was said, joined in the conversation. The lodge-keeper, after pointing out the spot on which the body of Walter had been found, and explaining the manner they had removed it from its perilous position, conducted them to the place where the chaise was discovered over-turned, and described the preparations they had made to carry him back. The detective said he should like to remain and continue his investigation till the Inspector came up, and the doctor and Mr. Keats, finding they could do no good by staying longer, left him with the lodge-keeper and proceeded onwards in the brougham.

On their arrival at the Red House, after hearing that Walter was still alive, they were conducted upstairs to his room, where they found Martha and Mrs. Thornbury, the former seated near the head of the bed, the other standing at the foot. The doctor, having first partially drawn aside the window curtains to allow more light to enter the room (for his orders to keep it in darkness had been strictly obeyed), ad-

vanced towards the bed to ascertain the condition of his patient. He found that the pulse had somewhat improved, but that Walter was breathing heavily and with great difficulty. After deciding that some slight improvement was perceptible since he last saw him, the window curtains were again closed; and Mrs. Thornbury, with the doctor and Mr. Keats, left the room, and descended to the drawing-room, Martha still remaining in her seat at the head of the bed. In fact, beyond casting that anxious inquiring look in the face of the medical man, which is so common among members of a family who are standing round the sick-bed of a loved relative, when the doctor, before pronouncing his opinion, is examining his patient, Martha seemed hardly to be aware of the presence of her two visitors. She sat there as silent and immoveable as a statue, her gaze fixed steadily on the face of "her boy" as she always called him, watching him with inexhaustible patience. Almost the only sign of solicitude she gave, was when some inspiration of Walter's appeared more difficult and laboured than the rest; and Martha would answer it by a momentary inarticulate sound of grief, so low and soft that, to use the words of the poet, "nothing seemed to stand

'twixt it and silence"—but so intense that it fairly went to Mrs. Thornbury's heart to hear her.

After Mrs. Thornbury had conversed with her visitors for some minutes, and the doctor had given some directions as to the treatment of his patient, the Inspector, in company with the detective, arrived at the house.

"What discoveries have you made?" asked the doctor.

"Nothing very satisfactory," was the Inspector's reply. "There are marks of different footsteps about the spot, but whether they are those of Miss Thornbury and the men who accompanied her, it is impossible to say. The rain which fell so heavily last night has to a considerable extent obliterated the marks; in fact, so much so, that even if I examined their shoes, I could not come to any satisfactory conclusion. What I now want to find out is whether the gentleman has been robbed. Has he lost anything?"

"Not that I know of," said Mrs. Thornbury.

"I suppose I may not see him?" asked the Inspector.

"Certainly not," replied the doctor. "In the first place he is utterly insensible, and even if

he were not, I could not allow any question to be asked him for some time to come, possibly a fortnight—even under the most favourable circumstances."

"Could I see the clothes he wore?"

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Thornbury. "I will have them brought into the library immediately, where you can inspect them at your leisure."

"Thank you, ma'am. In the meantime I will go round to the stables and examine the pony and chaise, and try if they will in any way lead to some conclusion on the matter."

They now went to the stable and first examined the pony. He had several severe bruises in the hocks, evidently caused by the shafts of the chaise as he galloped home, dragging them after him. On lifting up one of the pony's hind hoofs, the doctor looked at it attentively, and then said,

"The more I think over the matter, the more fully am I convinced that the wound on the poor fellow's skull was never caused by the pony's foot. It would certainly have made a different kind of wound, more of a tear and less of a cut than it is now."

"Could it have been cut by the chaise, sir?"

inquired the Inspector. "Let us examine that before we go further."

For some time the chaise presented no sign or mark that could guide them to a conclusion. At last, the doctor noticed a reddish stain, about the size of a crown piece, on one part of the cushions of the chaise. On examining it more closely, it was difficult to say whether it was simply a stain of iron mould on the drab coloured cloth, or a blood stain.

"If blood," remarked Mr. Keats, "the rain which has fallen on it has too much obliterated it to be of much service, I think."

"Of that I am not certain," said the doctor. "True, it has nearly taken it out of the cloth, but it must have carried it through to the lining and stuffing, though possibly to an extent only perceptible under a strong microscope. You had better have the piece cut out," he continued, addressing the Inspector, "and if you will bring it round to my house to-morrow morning, with a portion of the lining and padding immediately beneath it, we will examine it together."

The Inspector promised it should be done, and he then called a lad to him (Martha's groom), and asked him if he had ever noticed a spot of iron mould on the cushion. "Not only I never

did," was the lad's reply, "but I'll swear when I took that chaise to X—— yesterday morning it was not there."

"After all," said Mr. Keats, "I do not see what it would lead to, even if proved to be a blood stain. His face and hair, as well as his clothes, you say, were saturated with blood; did you not, doctor?"

"Yes, and he must have lost a great deal besides."

The Inspector made no remark, and they all, accompanied by the lodge-keeper (being the most intelligent of those who had been with Martha the night before) returned to the house.

On entering the library they found the clothes Walter had worn placed on the table ready for inspection. They were, of course, much stained with mud and blood, but none of them torn. The inside of his shirt collar on the right side was also much stained with blood. In one pocket of his waistcoat they found his *porte-monnaie* with several sovereigns in it, and some loose silver in the other. In the breast pocket of his coat was a small pocket-book containing a ten-pound note and some papers. Mrs. Thornbury also told them he had on his finger a ring of considerable value, which had been presented

to him by his uncle, and which he generally wore. In fact both the doctor and Mr. Keats could find nothing which indicated that the whole affair had not been the result of accident. On stating their opinion to the Inspector, with professional reticence he made no direct reply, but proceeded to question the lodge-keeper on the manner Walter had been brought home; how he had been placed in the chaise; where Miss Thornbury had been seated, and other questions, none of which seemed to bear particularly on the case. He then asked if he could see Miss Thornbury; but the doctor informed him she was so overpowered by the shock her nervous system had received, that he doubted her capability to give any correct information on the subject, and the Inspector put off questioning her till another opportunity.

"I think," he at last said, "there is no further information I can obtain at present; but if you will allow it I should like the detective to remain here till to-morrow. He will then be better able to make inquiries in the neighbourhood."

Mrs. Thornbury said he could do so if he pleased, and the Inspector then took his man (who during the conversation and after the ex-

amination of the clothes had apparently employed himself in reading the titles of the books on the shelves) with him into the hall, where he remained in conversation for a few minutes. He then returned to the library to tell Dr. Wilson he would call on him the next morning with the part of the cloth of the chaise cushion which had the stain on it; after which he left the Red House, and returned to X——.

As soon as the Inspector had gone, Mrs. Thornbury, the doctor, and Mr. Keats held a consultation together as to what further steps should be taken. It was decided that Mr. Keats should write by that night's post to Edgar Thornbury, informing him of the accident which had occurred to Walter, and requesting him to return home the next day. But a far more difficult subject had now to be entertained—how the intelligence should be broken to Fanny. Of course Mr. Keats was alone the person who could undertake the painful commission, and greatly did he dread the result. Fanny had for her betrothed an affection almost surpassing "the love of women," so attached was she to him. At any time the intelligence of a disaster of the kind would have been a terrible blow to her, but on the present occasion, when expecting

her marriage to be celebrated within a month with the man she so fondly loved, it might occasion a shock from which she might never recover; and if his death—and the danger was still imminent—should occur, it was more than probable the poor girl would follow him to the grave. There was, however, no alternative for her father; all he could do would be to delay telling her till the next morning, after he had heard how Walter had passed the night, the doctor having promised to call and bring the report when he had seen his patient at an early hour next day.

The conversation over, they returned to the sick-room, and after ascertaining that Walter, if not better, was certainly not worse than he had been an hour before, the doctor and Mr. Keats left the house and returned at once to X——, the latter wishing to arrive in time to write and post his letter to Edgar Thornbury, as well as not prematurely to excite any uneasiness in consequence of his lengthened absence from home.

After despatching his letter, Mr. Keats joined his family, and answered, or rather evaded, as he best could, their questions as to where he had been, and on what business Dr. Wilson had re-

quired his assistance. Unsatisfactory, if minutely examined, as his answers were, his family seemed content with them, and the conversation then turned on subjects connected with the approaching marriage. The position of Mr. Keats was then a painful one indeed, and on more than one occasion he was obliged to leave them, lest the weight of sorrow and anxiety on his mind might betray itself in his countenance, the high spirits and gaiety of his family making his grief the more paiuful. At last the evening came to a close, and the family were summoned for prayer. Although prayers were generally conducted by the worthy clergyman himself, on this occasion he requested his wife to read for him, and whether he mentally followed her is more than doubtful. Probably he was the while offering up a heartfelt prayer to the Almighty that Walter might recover from his accident, and that Fanny might have strength to support the dreadful intelligence it would be his painful duty to communicate to her the next morning.

About eight o'clock the following day, the doctor arrived at the Red House, and found his patient better than when he had left him the previous afternoon. Both his breathing and pulse had considerably improved, and with the

exception of one or two bruises on his body, of little importance, the wound on his head was the only injury he had received, and that shewed no unfavourable symptoms, although he was in a state of great danger. Martha, who had now somewhat recovered her self-possession, and who had sat by Walter's bed-side the whole of the night, related the little which had taken place since Dr. Wilson's last visit, and then asked him for his candid opinion on the case.

"What can I tell you?" he replied. "He is decidedly better, but that is all I can say. It will be some days yet—perhaps not less than a week or ten days—before I can speak with any certainty on the matter. There are many things yet to be dreaded, among others that of erysipelas developing itself in the wound. This may, however, be guarded against to some extent, by closely following my instructions, which I am sure you will do to the letter. Then again, when you perceive reason returning, you must let no questions be asked him, or permit anything to startle or excite him, allow as few persons as possible to enter the room, and keep the house as quiet as you can. One thing," he continued, looking in Martha's face, and noticing the feverish and an-

xious look upon it, "I must particularly impress upon you, and that is, if you intend to act as his nurse you must take care not to fatigue yourself too much, or you will certainly break down. Take my advice, and get some rest in the course of the day. I am sure Mrs. Thornbury will willingly take your place beside his bed the while. I shall call and see him again in the afternoon, and if I find you have not followed my instructions, I shall be very angry with you."

"Martha promised, though somewhat reluctantly, to take his advice, and the doctor then left the house.

On reaching home, Dr. Wilson found his friend, Mr. Keats, impatiently awaiting his arrival.

"What report do you bring from the Red House?" asked the latter. "I trust a favourable one."

"Upon the whole it certainly is," replied Dr. Wilson. "I found Walter Thornbury—for I suppose in future we are to call him by that name—decidedly more quiet than when I last saw him yesterday afternoon. His breathing is easier and his pulse better, and no unfavourable symptoms have yet shewn themselves in the wound on his scalp."

"Is he out of danger?"

"Certainly not; nor is he likely to be for some days yet. At the same time, every day that passes over his head, during which the slightest improvement is made, tends to diminish the risk. One great thing in his favour is the admirable nursing he is receiving from the hands of his aunt and Mrs. Thornbury. Indeed, so indefatigable is the former, that I was obliged this morning to warn her that if she did not take more rest, she would herself soon be on my list of patients."

"At any rate," said Mr. Keats, "I may tell my daughter, when I break the intelligence to her, that Walter is better this morning."

"That you decidedly may do with a clear conscience," was the doctor's reply.

"Suppose Fanny wishes to see him, would you offer any objection? Mind I do not propose it myself, but I should like to be prepared with an answer, in case she puts the question to me."

"I should think," replied Dr. Wilson, "it would be impossible to imagine anything worse-timed than her seeing him at present, or even for some days to come. In the first place, she could not be of the slightest service to him, as nothing can be done for him more than he re-

ceives already. In the next, the sight of him, in his present wounded and insensible condition, might have a very prejudicial effect upon Miss Fanny herself. And lastly, should there be the slightest approach to consciousness on his part, the excitement of her presence might have a most detrimental effect. No, you must insist in the most positive manner, and quote me as your authority, that on no account whatever may she at present visit the Red House. But assure her at the same time that, as soon as it may be done without danger, I will inform her."

"Did you hear any other news respecting the accident, and how it occurred?" inquired Mr. Keats.

"No, I did not, nor have I asked any further questions on the subject."

"My reason for inquiring," said Mr. Keats, "is that I have just seen the Inspector of Police—in fact, I wished him to return here with me that we might talk over the matter together, but he was unable to leave his office. I told him that in my opinion it was an accident, nothing more, and I asked him whether he did not coincide with me. However, like most others of his class, I could get no decided answer from him."

"Possibly he may wish to add a little more mystery to the affair than is altogether requisite, by way of bringing out his own exertions in a favourable light," was the doctor's reply. "He is, however, a very intelligent fellow, and has done an immense deal of good since he has been in the town. But to return to our former subject; tell your daughter from me, that if she will abstain from going to the Red House till she receives my permission, I will on my part promise to send her a bulletin every morning and evening of the state of my patient's health."

Mr. Keats now left the doctor's house, and about five minutes afterwards the Inspector, who had said he was too much occupied to leave his office, entered the consulting room. After telling Dr. Wilson he wished to speak to him privately, he drew from his pocket the small piece of cloth with the red stain on it which had been cut from the cushion, as well as the lining and some of the padding beneath.

"Before I go further into the matter, sir," said the Inspector, "you will oblige me by informing me positively whether that is a blood stain. In my own opinion it is. At the same time, as a good deal will hinge upon that fact, I

should like first to have your opinion on this point."

Dr. Wilson now produced a microscope, and after minutely examining the cloth, he tested it in a glass of water, to which it gave a red tinge.

"Without even going further in the examination," said Dr. Wilson, "I have no hesitation in saying that it is a blood stain, and not iron mould or paint. Nay more, that immediately after the cloth had been stained with it, water had fallen on it while it was still wet, and that a portion of it had been absorbed in the tissue of the cloth and lining beneath it. But after all, I don't see in what manner that will be of the slightest advantage to you. We know perfectly well that the poor fellow lost a considerable quantity of blood, and it is not to be wondered at if a drop fell on the cushion of the chaise."

"So far from being a subject of no importance, sir," said the Inspector, "it is a point on which the whole affair turns, in my opinion at least. If my suspicions are correct, I hold that it will lead to proofs that the wound was not inflicted by the pony, but by a direct blow from some edged tool as you yourself stated at first, and that two people were engaged in the attack."

The doctor, who, like most of his profession, took great interest in any point of medical jurisprudence, now began to listen attentively to the Inspector's remarks. He asked him what had induced him to think two persons were engaged in the attack.

"In the first place," replied the Inspector, "the spot of blood on the cushion shews that the wound had been inflicted while he was in the chaise, and therefore it could not have been done by the pony's hoofs. Again, you remember the blood stain inside the collar of his shirt; that also must have been done while sitting in an erect position, though certainly it might have occurred when he was being carried home in the chaise."

"And the stain on the cushion might also have occurred in carrying him home," said the doctor.

"I have taken that point into consideration," said the Inspector, "and can easily prove that it was not the case. I have inquired very carefully into the subject; and I find that Miss Thornbury took her seat in the pony carriage, before the wounded gentleman was placed in it, and that she was seated on the cushion which had the stain. My detective has also discovered through the lady's maid that there is a similar,

though faint, mark on the travelling cloak she wore at the time, corresponding with that on the cushion. I also find that the gentleman was removed from the chaise before Miss Thornbury left it."

"I must admit," said the doctor, "that your arguments seem very conclusive on the point. It appears to me clearly enough that the wound must have been inflicted while he was in the chaise."

"Another point," said the Inspector, "though not of very great consequence, is that the hat must first have been knocked off, or there would be the mark of a blow on it, and you saw yourself there is none. Let us now look at it from another point of view. Mr. Thornbury was found stretched near the water in the ditch, with his head away from the pony's heels, and therefore if he had received any blow from the pony, it must have been on his feet and not on his head. Again, although the rain which fell that night had somewhat obliterated other marks, there is no difficulty in tracing those of the carriage wheels for eight or ten yards beyond the spot on which the gentleman was found, before it fell into the ditch. And even then it did not completely turnover, for the pony struggled violently

to get a firm footing on the road, evidently showing that great exertions had been used to force him into the ditch. Further, we could trace marks of the wheels with more or less distinctness for fully a hundred and fifty yards beyond the spot on which Mr. Thornbury was found, and the pony seems to have made a violent effort at that place to gain the road, which he succeeded in doing, dragging the chaise after him, which fell over and snapped off the shafts. The conclusion I come to is this: that the pony's head was seized by one ruffian, while another knocked off Mr. Thornbury's hat, and then struck him a tremendous blow with some edged tool or weapon—which of the two you must be the best judge. They then attempted to throw him into the ditch, thinking that, if any life remained in him, he would be drowned, from the quantity of water in it. They afterwards tried to force the pony and chaise into the ditch also, to give as much as possible the appearance of an accident to the whole affair."

"I don't see," said the doctor, "what proof there is that two men were engaged in it instead of one, although I must say you have carried on the investigation with wonderful minuteness."

"My reason for believing that two men were engaged in it arises partly from your description of the wound, partly from the fact that the blow must have been struck when Mr. Thornbury was motionless, whether done by the pony or a would-be murderer. Again, I hardly think the strength of one man would have been sufficient to have got both the pony and chaise into the ditch; and there appears evident signs that the chaise was lifted bodily from the ground, and the two near wheels placed into the ditch. But now, sir, comes the most serious part of the case, and one on which I did not like to speak to Mr. Keats when he called at the office. There is something very mysterious in this affair, and for the furtherance of justice, I trust you will assist me in tracing it."

"You may depend upon it," said the doctor, "I will assist you in every way in my power, although I hardly see of what use I can be in the matter."

"Well, sir," said the Inspector, "I hardly like to tell you, but gentlemen of your profession see a good deal more of what takes place in the interior of houses than other people. From the case, as it at present stands, the attack which was made upon Mr. Thornbury was not done

for the purpose of robbery, but from personal animosity, or from some unknown reason totally apart from plunder. Otherwise his pocket-book and purse would not have been found on him, nor the ring on his finger. Now, what I want to ask you," continued the Inspector, "is, have you directly or indirectly heard of any family quarrels, or, as I understand Mr. Thornbury is about to be married to Miss Keats, whether anyone was jealous of the young lady?"

"I have heard nothing of the kind," said the doctor coolly; but getting interested in the question, in spite of himself—"Do you not think you had better apply to Mr. Keats on the subject?"

"I thought of doing so at first, sir," he replied, "but, upon consideration, feared it might give rise—if it proved correct—to some unpleasant remarks about the young lady, and I wished to know more about it before making my opinion public."

"Then you think the two ruffians were hired?" said the doctor.

"No, sir; one, at least, was personally interested in the matter. No man having the brains to concoct a plot of the kind, although it was somewhat clumsily carried out, would have

been fool enough to place himself in the power of two accomplices. One man might swear hard and fast against another, and nobody would know who was right; but when there are two to one, there are ugly odds to work against. No, sir; one, at least, of those implicated in the affair last night is personally interested in it. Now, if, during your visits to the Red House, you should hear anything which might throw light on the matter, you would greatly oblige me by informing me of it."

"I do not much like the commission," said the doctor; "however, I will give the subject my serious consideration. But if I do it at all, it will only be on the condition that you explain the whole to Mr. Thornbury as soon as possible after he arrives."

"Pray, sir," said the Inspector, "do not express any opinion adverse to the whole being the result of accident."

"Why not?" inquired the doctor.

"Because, if it is generally believed to be an accident, the parties implicated will possibly be coming near the house, and there may be a chance of our taking them. If, on the contrary, it is known to be an attempted assassination, they will keep as far away from it as they can."

"Well, then," said the doctor, "on that point I will follow your advice as far as I can. Nay, more, I promise if anything takes place in my hearing which will tend to throw light on the matter, I will inform you of it. I suppose I may not ask whether you have yet any clue to this mysterious affair?"

"Well, sir, I don't mind saying that I've not at present," replied the Inspector. "But I've got a very clever fellow, a detective, living in the house, and who also employs himself in making inquiries in the neighbourhood, so I hope in a few days to know a good deal more about the matter."

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERY.

SKILFULLY as Mr. Keats described to his daughter the disaster which had befallen Walter, and much as he mitigated the danger of the wound the poor fellow had received, the effect was most distressing on her. In vain he exceeded the statement of the doctor, and assured her that all danger now had passed, provided Walter could remain for some days in quietude, Fanny would neither be comforted nor assured. At first she seemed hardly to understand her father, but gazed at him in a state of bewildered amazement; then, when the truth became apparent, she burst into a violent flood of tears. Her mother and sisters did all in their power to console her, but without the slightest good effect. Then, rising from her chair, she insisted on immediately proceeding to the Red House to see Walter, and it was long before her family could induce her to listen to their as-

surance that by so doing she would very probably endanger his life.

By degrees becoming calmer, Fanny began to question her father as to the manner in which the accident had occurred, and the nature of the wound Walter had received. Mr. Keats told her all, and she then inquired the reason she had not sooner been informed of it. To this her father replied that at first Dr. Wilson was unable to ascertain the amount of injury, and was unwilling that she should be informed of Walter's state till he could confidently decide on the probability of his recovery.

"He has seen him this morning, my dear," continued Mr. Keats, "and considers him so much better that he gave me permission to tell you. He has, moreover, promised that he will visit him twice a day, morning and evening, and each time inform you, on his return, of the progress Walter is making."

"But when does Dr. Wilson think I may see him?"

"He says in a few days," replied Mr. Keats. "But be assured of this, as soon as you can do so with safety he will give you permission. As it is, at present, his aunt and Mrs. Thornbury are the only persons allowed to enter his room."

"Has his uncle heard of the accident?" asked Fanny.

"Yes, a letter was sent to him yesterday evening, and I have no doubt he will come either by the train which arrives at noon, or the one in the afternoon at the latest. Now, like a dear girl, trust in the goodness of the Almighty, and pray that all may end well."

As soon as Mr. Keats found his daughter more composed, he left her to the care of her mother, and directed his steps to the railway station to meet the train which was due at noon, expecting Mr. Thornbury might arrive by it. He was doomed, however, to be disappointed, for Mr. Thornbury was not in it; and he then called on the doctor to inquire at what time he proposed visiting Walter, and whether he should return before the arrival of the afternoon train, as in that case they might go together to the station to meet Mr. Thornbury, who, of course, would be most anxious to know the state his nephew was in.

"I shall start almost immediately," said Dr. Wilson, "as I have a consultation to attend at four o'clock. It will, I think, be over before the train arrives, and I will meet you at the station. But why do you not accompany me to the Red

House? I am sure Mrs. Thornbury and her sister-in-law would take it as a very kind action on your part."

"I have to perform service at the Cathedral," said Mr. Keats, "or I would willingly do so. You will greatly oblige me if, on your return, you will call in the Close before attending the consultation, for Fanny, as you may easily imagine, is dreadfully distressed, and it was only by assuring her that you would always give her a report of the progress Walter was making after your visits to him, that I could get her to abstain from going to see him herself."

"Certainly I will call, if you wish it."

"Are you still of opinion that Walter's wound was not the effect of accident?" inquired Mr. Keats.

"I am not altogether able to pass a decided opinion on the subject," replied the doctor, remembering the wish expressed by the Inspector of Police. "The point that principally puzzles me is, if it was the act of some villains, for what purpose was it done? They were certainly not instigated by the wish to rob him, for they could have done so easily; and I never heard of either Walter or his uncle having any enemies."

"Nor I," said Mr. Keats. "I do not know a

soul that would have been likely to bear ill-will to either."

"Possibly then," said Dr. Wilson, "I have been mistaken after all. But you see I am obstinate, like most other members of my profession, and do not like to give up an opinion I have once formed on a professional matter."

"I think you must be wrong," said Mr. Keats. "Had Mr. Thornbury been a strict preserver of game, it might have been the spiteful act of some poachers, or—but it is impossible. Neither he nor his nephew can have an enemy in these parts, and we may as well make up our minds that the affair has been purely accidental."

True to his promise, the doctor, on his return from the Red House, called on Fanny Keats, whom he saw at the window as soon as he came in sight of the house, anxiously waiting his arrival, and long before he reached the door she had opened it to admit him. Unable from emotion to speak, she glanced with anxious curiosity in his face, as if to read there the quality of the news he had brought her. The doctor easily understood it, and said,

"I am happy to tell you that my patient is progressing in a very satisfactory manner. Not a single unfavourable symptom has shown it-

self, while both his breathing and pulse are better, the wound assuming a more healthy form, and I have every reason to imagine that consciousness is returning. More than once during my visit he turned his eyes as if he had begun to recognize me, and I have no doubt that tomorrow, if he passes a good night, he will be in a still more lucid condition. In these cases, when once reason begins to return, if the patient is carefully treated, there is comparatively seldom a relapse."

"Then," said Fanny, "I suppose as soon as he begins to recover his senses I may see him."

"It is precisely when recovering his senses that I shall particularly object to your seeing him. The slightest shock might be prejudicial, and it is better for you to be patient a few days longer. I promise you, as soon as I consider you may see him with safety, I will withdraw all opposition. Now tell me, has your papa yet returned from the Cathedral?"

"No, he has not," said Fanny, "but I do not think he will be long. Do you wish to speak to him? I will give him any message you like to leave."

"It is of no great consequence," said the doctor, "for I shall meet him at the railway station.

All I wish to speak to him about is, if he goes to the Red House to-morrow, which I hope he will do, he will use his influence with Miss Thornbury to induce her to take some rest. And you had better," he continued, "send her a note by your papa. This morning I noticed she did not look well, and I insisted on her reposing herself during the day, which she promised me she would do, but when I was there a few hours ago she had not, I found, kept her word. She is already very ill from exposure to the rain on the evening of the accident, which has brought on a severe cold, and she may consider herself fortunate if it does not end in an attack of the lungs, while the unceasing manner in which she watches by her nephew's bedside is increasing the mischief. Now promise me you will write to her this evening, and if you send the note round to my house, I will take it with me in the morning."

Fanny promised she would do so, and the doctor, after conversing a few minutes with Mrs. Keats, left the house to attend the consultation, and when it was over he hurried to the railway station to await the arrival of the afternoon train by which Mr. Thornbury was expected. On the platform he met Mr. Keats, who of course

inquired how he had found his patient that afternoon.

"He is decidedly better," said Dr. Wilson, "and if we can get over the tenth day satisfactorily, I think there would be no donbt of his ultimate recovery. At the same time it may be long before he is thoroughly restored to health. Very frequently wounds of so serious a description on the head are apt, when they are cured, to leave great weakness behind them; but, however, with care in his case we shall have little to fear. Of course, after leaving the Cathedral you called at home before coming here. Did your daughter give you my message?"

"She did; and if you have no objection, tomorrow morning I will accompany you to the house, and have some serious conversation with Miss Thornbury on the subject. It would be a sad thing if she were thrown on a bed of sickness. Not solely on her own account, but on Walter's as well. Did you hear any news when you were at the Red House?"

"Nothing whatever," replied the doctor. "I saw the detective there, but he had discovered nothing."

"I did not imagine he would," said Mr. Keats. "In the first place, I believe there is very little

to discover; and in the next, he seems a very dull, apathetic sort of fellow. How does he seem to employ his time at the Red House?"

"Principally, I think, in visiting beer-shops or public-houses," said the doctor, laughing. "From what I gather he appears to be either there or lounging about the country the whole day. I've no doubt he finds himself in very comfortable quarters, and will be in no hurry to quit them. But I see the train is coming, and I sincerely hope we shall find Thornbury in it."

The train now drew up at the station, and to the great satisfaction of both Mr. Keats and Dr. Wilson, they saw Mr. Thornbury in one of the compartments. He quickly recognised them, and leaping out on the platform, anxiously inquired what news they had brought him.

"Fortunately," replied Dr. Wilson, "as far as it goes, I can say favourable. Your nephew is decidedly better, and I much hope that by to-morrow he will regain the use of his senses. At the same time I will not disguise from you he is in a very precarious condition."

"Have you ascertained how the affair occurred?" inquired Mr. Thornbury.

"In my opinion, it is a pure accident," said Mr. Keats.

"You told me in your note that he had not been robbed," remarked Mr. Thornbury.

"Not to the value of a shilling," said Mr. Keats, "which in my opinion clearly indicates it was an accident."

"It certainly looks like it," said Mr. Thornbury. "What does the Police Inspector say?"

"Oh! of course he is very mysterious about it," said Mr. Keats, "and won't give a decided opinion one way or the other, probably to enhance the value of his services. Would you like to see him before you go home?"

"I think I should," said Mr. Thornbury; "at any rate I should feel more satisfied on the subject. We will go to his office at once."

The Police Inspector told Mr. Thornbury no more than he had already heard, beyond that, although he had a detective and several men making inquiries, he had hitherto received no intelligence likely to lead to the discovery of the perpetrators, if indeed the whole was not altogether an accident. He would go on, he said, with his inquiries, and even if he did not succeed in gaining any further information, the very absence of proof would be satisfactory, as tending to show that the mischief was done accidentally.

They now left the police office, but before Mr. Thornbury started for home the doctor impressed on him the absolute necessity of keeping his arrival a secret from Walter, should consciousness have returned, as any mental irritation or excitement might have a prejudicial effect. He also begged him to insist on Martha taking some rest, otherwise she would herself be thrown on a bed of sickness. Mr. Thornbury promised to follow his advice, and then quitted them to return home.

Although not wishing to disobey the instructions of Dr. Wilson, Edgar Thornbury, on arriving at home, could not resist the temptation to visit his nephew. Fortunately he had an opportunity of doing so without any danger arising from it, for Walter, on his entrance, was asleep. Sufficient light having been admitted into the room to allow him to see his nephew, Edgar gazed at him for some moments, and then, covering his eyes with his hand, tears were soon seen to fall from beneath it. Martha, noticing her brother's emotion, went to him, and after kissing him, in scarcely audible whispers she endeavoured to console him. He remained a few minutes in the room, and then quitted it, taking Martha with him. After look-

ing at her earnestly for a few moments, and noticing the change in her appearance, and remembering the advice Dr. Wilson had given him, he said to her,

"Martha, my dear sister, Wilson tells me you are ill, and over-exerting yourself. I trust it is not the case, and if not for your own sake, at least for Walter's, I hope you will be cautious. Promise me one thing—that you will rest to-night. If you do, you may take your place by Walter's bedside again to-morrow morning."

"But, Edgar, dear," said Martha, who seemed to think herself the only person capable of attending on the invalid, "who is to nurse Walter during the night, if I go to bed?"

"I will do it myself, Martha," said her brother. "Come, now, we will make a compact; if you go to bed, and I find any chance of his return to consciousness, I promise to call you and leave you in my place, for Wilson tells me I had better not be seen by Walter till he has fully recovered the use of his senses."

Martha gave one glance of intense affection at her brother, and then consented to follow his advice. The next morning, when Dr. Wilson called, he found Martha at her post. He was on the point of remonstrating with her, when

she assured him that during the night she had had several hours' good rest, her brother having taken her place as nurse, but that, finding Walter was becoming more sensible, he had, as he promised, called her, and quitted the room himself.

The doctor found Walter considerably improved—in fact, he evidently recognised him, and attempted to speak. This, however, the doctor would not allow, and he strictly prohibited any questions being put to him, especially concerning the accident. Before leaving the house, Edgar Thornbury asked the doctor if he could give him any explanation of the reason why the detective was still living there.

"I know of none," replied the doctor, "beyond wishing to discover, if possible, how the affair occurred."

"Now, candidly, what is your opinion of it, Wilson?"

"That I really cannot understand in what manner such a wound as your nephew has upon his head could have been caused by a kick from the pony. At the same time, I would advise you to speak with the Inspector of Police on the subject, and insist on his telling you what he thinks of the whole affair. If you like, when I

return home, I will tell him to call upon you this afternoon."

"You will greatly oblige me by doing so," said Edgar. "I do not see, however, if he has anything particular to tell me, why he should not have done so when I was at the office."

"Possibly he may have some professional reason," said the doctor, with assumed carelessness, wishing to avoid stating that his reticence was probably occasioned by Mr. Keats's presence. "But I will tell him you are most anxious for information, and that you particularly wish to see him this afternoon. Is there any other message or commission I can execute for you?"

"Nothing, thank you," said Edgar; "only do not let the Inspector fail to come here this afternoon, for without any particular data to go upon, I assure you I feel very anxious about the whole matter. There seems an air of mystery over it, which I cannot account for."

When Dr. Wilson paid his visit in the afternoon, he brought with him in his brougham the Inspector of Police. Edgar Thornbury and Martha received him in the dining-room, Mrs. Thornbury having taken her place by Walter's bedside.

"I wish to ask you," said Edgar, "if you have anything to communicate to me respecting the accident which has happened to my nephew, or do you imagine it really to be an accident?"

"I not only do not imagine it to be an accident," replied the Inspector, "but I am certain it has been done purposely—that it was perpetrated through spite, or some private feeling, and that two persons were employed in it." And here the Inspector went through the different arguments which have been made use of, and which were detailed in the last chapter.

Edgar Thornbury was completely aghast at the statements, and at first attempted to argue against a supposition of the kind. "No one, said he, "could bear my nephew the slightest animosity. A kinder-hearted fellow never existed, and I am certain he has given offence to no one."

Martha, also, who considered her nephew's character somewhat attacked by the bare possibility of his having an enemy, indignantly, and certainly energetically, rejected the suggestion. The Inspector, when she had finished, looked at her steadily for some moments, and then said—

"Very possibly, ma'am, he may not have had the intention to offend anyone, and yet have

done so. Cases of the kind have very frequently occurred to me in the course of my experience."

There was something so pointed in the way the Inspector had spoken, that Martha was obliged to ask him to what he alluded.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "I will not disguise from you what I mean; but understand me, I intend no offence. I have heard that Mr. Thornbury is engaged to be married to Miss Keats. Do you think that jealousy might have been mixed up in the matter in any way?"

"Jealousy!" said Martha indignantly. "Certainly not. How can you have such an absurd idea."

"Stop, Martha," said her brother, "at any rate the point is worth inquiring into. Are you certain that Fanny has no admirer who might feel himself aggrieved at the preference she has shown to Walter?"

"Utterly absurd," said Martha. "Fanny is as good a girl as ever lived, and faithfully attached to Walter. Besides, do you think it could be the case without my knowing it, much as I have seen of her?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't imagine anything of the kind," said the Inspector, trying to soothe Mar-

tha. "At the same time, Miss Keats might have been very much admired without her having given any encouragement."

"Nonsense," said Martha, so abruptly, that neither the Inspector nor her brother seemed inclined to carry on the conversation further on that point.

"I don't wish," said the Inspector, turning to Mr. Thornbury, "to ask any unpleasant questions, but do you know any person likely to owe you a grudge? It's very possible that Mr. Walter Thornbury might have been mistaken for you, as I understand you were expected to arrive that evening."

"That is perfectly true," said Edgar thoughtfully. "It never struck me in that light before. No," he continued, after a moment's silence, "thank God, I believe I have not an enemy in the world—at least I have never willingly made myself one."

"Then," said the Inspector, "I am fairly puzzled what to make of the whole affair. I never in my life had a case so completely inexplicable."

"And you are still not inclined to admit it to have been an accident?" asked Edgar.

"I am," said the Inspector. "On the contrary,

I am positively certain that it was an attempted murder."

"But you have had a man here for some days," said Martha, who, fully convinced in her own mind that the whole had been an accident, was now getting very indignant at the pertinacity of the inspector. "Has he not been able to get you any information? And I really think, Edgar," she continued, addressing her brother, "that the sooner the man leaves the house the better, for I heard this morning from my maid that he spends nearly the whole day in lounging about the different public-houses and beer-shops in the neighbourhood, and talking with every idle person he meets."

"He can leave as soon as you please, ma'am," said the Inspector coolly, and somewhat angrily, "at the same time, my man knows his duty, and I am fully convinced he has been doing it faithfully."

Edgar Thornbury, wishing to calm the angry feeling caused by his sister's irritability, which was evidently rising in the mind of the Inspector, endeavoured to change the conversation.

"But is there any person living in the neighbourhood whom you have any suspicion of?"

"No, sir, no one. At first I was somewhat

inclined to think a disreputable looking elderly man, who has been hanging about here for some days, might have been implicated in it, though without any good reason to go upon. I mean the fellow who frightened Miss Thornbury by stopping her as she was coming home in her pony-chaise one day, for the purpose of begging. But after all I could discover no connection between him and this affair."

"Has he been seen about the neighbourhood?" inquired Edgar Thornbury.

"Yes, he was seen about eight o'clock that evening near the town. He seemed to be a friend of some of the navvies here, but although I made every inquiry about him and his associates that I could, there was nothing whatever to prove that he was implicated in this affair, or, in fact, in any other. From all I could learn, he was merely one of those scamps who hang about fairs and races with three thimbles and a pea, or a pack of cards, but as I couldn't find that he practised his profession here, I had no right to interfere with him."

The doctor, who had quitted them on arriving at the house to visit his patient, now entered the room.

"Well, I am happy to tell you," he said, "that

our friend upstairs is going on very satisfactorily. He not only recognised me, but even attempted to speak, though that I would not allow him to do."

"Could I not see him, sir?" asked the Inspector.

"Certainly not," said the doctor, "nor will I have a question asked him for some time to come; and you must be careful, Miss Thornbury," he continued, turning to Martha, who, now deadly pale, had seated herself on a sofa apart from the others, "that no one—" Here Dr. Wilson advanced anxiously to Martha, and after looking at her attentively for a moment, he said, "My dear Miss Thornbury, I must insist on your taking more care of yourself. Why, dear me—"

Here Martha fell senseless on the floor, and all rushed forward to assist her, and again placing her on the sofa, the doctor felt her pulse.

"It is merely a fainting fit," he said. "She exerts herself too much. You must insist, Mr. Thornbury, on her taking more care of herself. Please to ring the bell, and call for her maid."

Restoratives were now applied, and Martha soon recovered from her fainting-fit. She first cast around her the usual inquiring look habitual to those returning to consciousness after an at-

tack of the kind; but as soon as her eye fell on the Inspector, the expression on her face changed to one of positive terror, and she trembled violently. The doctor, attributing it to a mere shivering fit, the result of an imperfect return of the heart's action, proposed that she should immediately be helped upstairs and placed in bed. As they were leaving the room, he said to her brother,

"You see, Mr. Thornbury, the absolute necessity there is for your sister taking more care of herself. Her strength is not as great as she imagines it to be, and intense anxiety deadens to her senses the inordinate amount of fatigue she is undergoing, while her physical powers are unable to support the strain placed upon them.

"Be assured, Wilson, it shall be no fault of mine if you have further cause of complaint," Edgar replied, who had been greatly alarmed at Martha's fainting-fit. "I wish you could send me a good and experienced nurse, so that my sister need have no excuse for being incessantly at Walter's bedside."

"I will do so as soon as I return," said the doctor. "One of our infirmary nurses has just left us, and she has not yet obtained another

situation. I will, if I can find her, send her to you at once, so that she may commence her duties without delay. I will just run upstairs now to see your sister, and I will not fail to impress upon her the necessity of allowing the nurse I shall send to sit up with your nephew every night."

After a short visit to his two patients, the doctor left them to return with Mr. Keats to X——. When the carriage had passed the lodge gates, the doctor said to his companion,

"I think our friend Thornbury will for the future find his sister more amenable to reason on the subject of nursing her nephew."

"Why so?"

"Because her fainting-fit appears to have frightened her considerably. When I told her I was going to send down a nurse to take her place by Walter's bedside during the night, she not only made no objection, but gazed at me with a bewildered, half-frightened sort of look, as if her mind were dwelling on some subject which had alarmed her."

"Possibly she might have been shaken by the fall," Mr. Keats remarked; "for I do not think she is a person easily alarmed about herself, especially when doing a good turn to anyone she

is interested in, and, above all, one she is as fond of as Walter. But do not let it be known at my house that you are about sending down a hired nurse, or you will greatly hurt Fanny's feelings. The only argument which could induce her to refrain from paying a visit to the Red House was that Walter could see no one but his aunt and Mrs. Thornbury."

The doctor, having promised to keep the engagement of the nurse a secret, the conversation on the subject dropped.

The reader probably has already divined the cause of Martha's sudden indisposition, and her passive submission to the doctor's orders. The instant the Inspector of Police mentioned that at first his suspicions had fallen on Morecombe, the terrible idea flashed across her mind that the would-be murderer of her nephew was no other than his own father, and the effect produced by it was so terrible that she had fainted under it. On recovering her senses, when her eye fell on the Inspector, it called to her remembrance the dreadful idea, and so completely was she absorbed in it, that she unresistingly submitted to the doctor's advice for her to retire to her room. When he there visited her, so far from being frightened, as he had

imagined, by the accident which had befallen her, and the possible danger of continuing so unremittingly her self-imposed duties by the bedside of Walter, not an idea of the kind had entered her imagination. Instead of listening to his arguments with attention, it is more than probable that, after he had left the room, she never cast one thought on anything he had said. There she remained, her whole mental energies employed in attempting to reduce to some order the turbid current of thought which was passing through her brain. It was some hours, however, before she could succeed—in fact, not till evening was beginning to close in, and the fading light allowed her to dwell without interruption, by the sight of external objects, on the position of affairs.

Martha was now able to trace with tolerable succinctness her two interviews with Morecombe, and the conversations which had taken place. From the remembrance of her first interview she could find nothing to lead her to imagine that Morecombe had been implicated in the affair; with the second it was very different. She now recalled to mind how altered had been his behaviour on that occasion from the day before, how he had questioned her

on her brother's affairs, and the relative position between him and his nephews. She remembered having informed him that her brother, who had no family of his own, loved his nephews as if they had been his own children, and not only intended to retire from business himself, leaving it entirely in their hands, but that he purposed making them his heirs. Afterwards she brought to mind having told him, in answer to his request to have the money before the bank at X——closed, that her brother would not arrive till after office hours, and that as he would be delayed on business till late at night in X——, it would not be possible for her to get the money till the next morning. No, the whole affair was clear to her—Morecombe had waylaid her brother, and Walter instead had proved his victim.

Having now come to the terrible conclusion that Morecombe was the wretch who had attempted to assassinate Walter, her next idea was, what steps ought she to take in the matter, whether to inform her brother of her suspicions or to keep them a secret. Should she tell him of her interviews with Morecombe, and the conversations which had passed between them, she knew Edgar's temper too well

to imagine that he would not immediately put the police on his track, and offer a liberal reward for his apprehension. Should he be taken, what then would be the position of affairs? Walter of course when sufficiently recovered would be called upon to give evidence against his own father, and it would not be possible for a son to be placed in a more painful position. Should he refuse to do it, a serious breach between Walter and his uncle might ensue. Her brother, she felt, apart even from the feeling of detestation he would have at the atrocious attempt to murder his nephew, had that undying hatred against Morecombe, that the desire of vengeance alone for the treatment of his sister Charity, and other members of the family, would make him pursue him with unrelenting severity. Another idea then arose which added to her embarrassment. Should it appear afterwards that she was wrong in her suspicions—and after all she might be in error—the very publicity which an attempt to prosecute Morecombe would produce, might again awaken the scandal of the trial for bigamy had occasioned, and which had now died out.

The more Martha thought over the matter the more perplexed she became; but at last her

cogitations were put an end to by the entrance of Mrs. Thornbury, who had come to ascertain the state of her health. Martha told her she felt much better, and that she would now dress herself again, in order to take her place for the night by Walter's bedside.

"Dr. Wilson has positively prohibited your doing so, dear," said Mrs. Thornbury. "He says you are not strong enough for such fatigue, and if you attempt it you will make yourself ill. Now, dear, do remain quietly where you are till to-morrow. You must see by your fainting-fit to-day that you are unable to continue the exertion, and it would be folly on your part to persist in it."

Martha could easily have shewn her sister-in-law that the fatigue she had undergone had but little to do with her fainting, but she made no remark on the subject.

"But what will Walter do without me?" she asked. "He must have somebody to sit up with him, and if I do not, you must, and your health is quite as valuable as mine."

"There is no occasion for either, Martha. Dr. Wilson has sent us down an excellent nurse from the Infirmary, who will watch Walter at night. She arrived about two hours since, and

is now by his bedside in the next room. To-morrow, if you please, we will take it by turns to nurse him, but neither of us for the future will be required at night—that is to say, if all goes on favourably, and Dr. Wilson thinks, if nothing occurs to bring on a relapse, the great danger may now be over."

"Thank God for it," said Martha. "Although I do not like another fulfilling my duty, I will follow your advice and stay where I am. I suppose he is going on satisfactorily to-night?"

"Quite so; and his intelligence is fast returning. He easily perceived the nurse when she entered the room, and turned an inquiring look on me, as if to ask who she was. I told him, and he evidently understood me. How glad I shall be when he is sufficiently recovered to tell us how the accident happened. For my own part, I am by no means easy about it. There is a mystery over the affair which I cannot understand. If I speak to Edgar about it, he gives me short and unsatisfactory answers; and the Inspector of Police seems to have some suspicion that it was not an accident after all."

"Did he say anything further on the subject after I had left the room?" asked Martha, anxiously.

"Very little. I attempted to question him, but he seemed rather to evade answering me."

"Is his man still here?"

"He is," replied Mrs. Thornbury; "but if they are certain it was an accident, why he should remain here any longer I cannot tell. He is even worse than the Inspector himself. It is difficult enough to get an answer from him. At any rate, he asks few questions; but his man will give no information whatever, though he enters into conversation, and asks questions of every one he meets. But I fear I am fatiguing you, dear. Can I do anything for you? or shall I send Cooper to you?"

"No, thank you," said Martha. "I require nothing more."

"Well, then, good night, dear; and I hope to-morrow I shall find you perfectly restored." And Mrs. Thornbury then left the room.

For some time after her sister-in-law had gone, Martha's thoughts continued on the topics which had occupied them before she entered the room, without arriving at any satisfactory result. At last she fell into a sort of feverish sleep, and her dreams were on subjects connected with the events of the last few days; but although they came with great vividness before

her, they were without sequence. She imagined she was again conversing with Morecombe, but the subject of their conversation differed strangely from what had taken place at their last interview. She accused him openly of having attempted the assassination of his son, which Morecombe indignantly denied. Then she found herself in the chaise with the senseless form of Walter at her feet, his head resting on her lap. Afterwards she was in the room when the Inspector of Police mentioned that his suspicions had at first fallen on Morecombe, but that he had been unable to identify him with the crime. At last they settled down into something like continuity. She imagined she was sitting in the night by the bedside of Walter as he slept. Then the current of thought which had occupied her the evening before came to her mind. She had then reflected on the amount of misery her dear sister Charity had been spared by her premature death, and how great would have been her sorrow had she been able to witness the deplorable condition Walter was then in.

As on the previous evening, Martha imagined in her dream that she saw Walter move, and she slightly rose in her chair to look at him more con-

veniently, the night-lamp being placed in such a position as to cast the least possible light on the bed, so as not to disturb him. Finding him quiet she again sunk back in her chair, and her mind reverted to her sister, when the idea came over her that she was not alone with Walter, and lifting her eyes, she saw standing on the other side of the bed the form of her sister, apparently watching her son. Martha experienced no feeling of surprise at the apparition—on the contrary, there appeared nothing abnormal in her presence, and she gazed on Charity for some time, without the latter seeming to notice her. Presently the figure turned towards Martha, and cast on her a look full of love, but without uttering a word. In this manner they remained, Martha sitting in her easy-chair watching her sister, who stood as motionless as a statue, with the exception that her glance alternately looked at Walter and then on Martha. There she stood, till the first rays of dawn through the window blinds became apparent, and then her form seemed to melt in them; but before it had entirely vanished, Martha awoke.

It was still dark night in the room, but so vividly had the form of her sister been impressed

on Martha's mind, that she thought she saw her standing by her own bedside, notwithstanding the obscurity which surrounded her. On becoming fully awake, however, she found she was mistaken, and that she had been dreaming; but so great was the effect of her dream, that she could not resist the desire of going into Walter's room, with an undefined hope that she might there see the shade of her sister, notwithstanding that she remembered the nurse was with Walter at the time. Rising from her bed, and throwing on a dressing-gown, she softly felt her way to the door of communication between the rooms. Gently as she entered, the nurse heard her, and rising from the easy-chair Martha had occupied the previous night, advanced to meet her.

"He is sleeping as gently as a lamb, ma'am," said the nurse, "nor has he woke once during the whole of the night. I'm sure he's going on very well."

"Do you know what time it is?" inquired Martha.

"About a quarter of an hour ago I heard a clock outside the house strike two, ma'am."

"If you are tired, you can lie down a little on that sofa," said Martha, pointing to a couch

which had been placed in the room. "I will take your place for you."

"Oh, no, ma'am," said the nurse; "you will only tire yourself. I'm well used to this sort of life, and it has no effect on me."

"Just as you please," said Martha; "but let me have that chair, I should like to watch him myself a little. You had better, though, take my advice, and rest yourself while you can."

The woman hesitated for a few moments, and then said,

"You're very kind, ma'am. I will if you will allow me, for coming here tired me a good deal. I'm not much used to walking, and I came on foot the whole of the way, carrying my things with me."

Martha now took her seat in the easy-chair, while the nurse stretched herself on the couch, and, overcome by fatigue, in a few moments was fast asleep.

With the exception of the heavy breathing of the tired nurse, and the lighter respirations of Walter, the chamber, as well as the whole house, was as silent as the grave. The death-like stillness seemed to have a calming effect on Martha, who remained seated in the easy-chair, her eyes turned to the other side of the

bed, as if watching for the apparition of her sister. She remained for some time in this position, anxiously hoping Charity would appear to her; but she came not. Still she hoped on. At length the indescribable feeling of awe which generally preluded the visit of her sister began to be felt by her, but it had hardly acquired any force when the clock in the turret over the stable striking three awoke Walter. In a few moments, however, he was asleep again, and Martha reseated herself in the easy-chair, and attempted to force her train of thought on her sister. But all in vain. Earnestly as Martha wished to see Charity, the latter came not. Still she watched on till the dawn became visible through the window curtains, and not till then did she relinquish the hope that her sister would appear to her.

The nurse now awoke, and rising from the couch, begged Martha to allow her to take her place by Walter's bedside, which, after a little demur, she consented to do; and, entering her own room shortly afterwards, she fell into a refreshing slumber, from which she did not awake till a short time before the arrival of Dr. Wilson.

On meeting her brother and his wife, they both complimented Martha on the change for the better in her appearance.

"The doctor was right, Martha, after all," said Edgar; "why, you do not look like the same person who left this room yesterday as pale as a ghost. A good night's rest has done you a vast amount of good. Walter also seems much better this morning, and evidently recognized me when I entered the room. I almost fancied he wanted to speak to me; but I remembered Wilson's injunction that he should not be allowed to talk, and I made a sign to him to be silent. I shall be very glad, however, when permission is given, for I very much want to hear from his own lips how the affair happened."

A singular change seemed also to have come over Martha's way of thinking. Had her brother made the same remark to her the day before, it would have caused her the greatest alarm, now she heard it with perfect equanimity. She appeared no longer acting on her own unaided judgment, but as if she was relying on another whose opinion she was following. She made no direct answer to Edgar's remark, and the conversation turned to other subjects. About nine o'clock Dr. Wilson arrived, and at the same moment came the boy with the post-bag. On entering the house, the doctor inquired of Mr. Thornbury the state of Walter's health, for both

Martha and her brother had gone to the door to meet him; and also to take the letters from the bag previously to giving it to the servant in whose charge it was generally placed, till the letters were collected for the evening post.

Martha had just given the bag to the man-servant, and was returning to the breakfast room, when, glancing her eye over the four or five letters she held, she saw one addressed to herself. At first she did not recognize the hand-writing, and yet it did not appear strange to her. Finding the doctor about leaving the room to visit his patient upstairs, Martha slipped her own letter into her pocket, and giving the others to her brother, accompanied the former to Walter's room.

The change which had taken place in Martha's appearance since the previous night was hardly as great as that perceptible in Walter. He evidently had now regained the use of his mental faculties, and greeted his aunt and the doctor with a smile as they entered the room. Dr. Wilson, advancing to the bedside, took Walter's hand in his, and noticing the intelligent expression on his countenance, said to him, "Do you feel better this morning?"

"Much better," was Walter's reply, in a per-

fectly articulate manner. "I think I shall soon get well now."

"Bravo," said the doctor. "I am very glad to hear you think so. But don't talk any more now. In a day or two you may converse as much as you like."

Walter, however, did not obey the doctor, but said, "How is Fanny?"

"She was quite well when I saw her last evening, and I have no reason to doubt its being the case this morning. But once more, I must not have you talk for a day or two, or at any rate till I give you permission. Miss Keats will be delighted to hear how much better you are this morning, and if you obey my injunctions, I think there will be no objection to her coming to see you shortly. But absolute quiet must be maintained for a day or two longer, so say no more now, but let me examine the wound on your head."

The nurse now brought the basin with warm water and a sponge, and Dr. Wilson, taking out his case of instruments, commenced dressing and bandaging the wound, which he found in a very healthy condition, without the least appearance of erysipelas or any other untoward symptom. After he had finished he said, "Now see if

you can go to sleep again. You are going on so well there will be no occasion for me to visit you this afternoon." Then turning to Martha, he said in a half whisper, "You have no reason to be anxious about him any further, Miss Thornbury, for all will go on well now."

When Dr. Wilson rejoined Mr. Thornbury and his wife below, the former briefly mentioned the great improvement in Walter's health since the day before. "Indeed it is so great," he continued, "that I shall cease my afternoon calls."

"I suppose he knew you?" inquired Mr. Thornbury.

"Perfectly," replied the doctor, "and he is evidently in as full possession of his senses as I am. If to-morrow there should be as great an improvement in his health as there is to-day, I see no reason why some questions may not be asked him respecting the accident. At the same time, I should like to ask them myself, so that I may cease them if I perceive any excessive mental irritation arising from them."

"Not a question shall be asked him," said Edgar, "till you arrive to-morrow, and then I hope we shall be able to obtain some definite information from him. By-the-bye, Wilson, I think it would be better if you made your visit a little

later, and brought with you the Inspector of Police, as I know early in the morning he is always busy in his office. Could you manage it without inconvenience to yourself?"

"Certainly," said the doctor, "with very great pleasure. I will bring him with me if he can leave X——. I suppose you have heard nothing more here."

"Not a word," said Edgar Thornbury.

"Well, to-morrow, I hope your anxiety will be satisfied," said the doctor as he bade them good morning.

Martha, in the meantime, had gone to her room, so that undisturbed she might read the letter she had received. On opening it, she glanced at the signature, and found it was from Morecombe, and dated from an obscure by-street in Kennington. In it he told her that he had arrived in London a few hours after he quitted her, and had taken a room, in which he intended to remain till he left England, which he hoped would be in the course of ten days or a fortnight. He had taken, he said, a berth on board a ship which would start about that time for New York. He thanked her warmly not only for the liberality she had shown him, but for the further sum she had promised, and which as he had full

reliance in her he should receive before leaving England. He would prefer, he said, having the money in bank-notes rather than a cheque, as he did not wish it to be known that he was in any way connected with her family—not from any feeling of his own, as he should consider it an honour to belong to it, but in accordance with her wishes, which he had determined to carry out to the letter—even to refrain from calling on his dear son before his departure, overpowering as the temptation was. He would remain in his present lodgings, where a letter would find him till his departure for America, or, should circumstances occur to induce him to remove, he would give her notice of his new address.

When Martha had finished reading the letter, she gave a deep sigh of relief, as it appeared to exonerate him from any participation in the attack on Walter. In fact it was evident he did not even know it had occurred. Grateful indeed did she now feel that she had not mentioned it to her brother, for she had avoided both the public scandal it might have produced, and the possibility of a personal dispute between them. So happy did she feel, that, after spending the morning in Walter's room, she proposed

taking a walk with her brother in the afternoon, and he willingly acceded to her request.

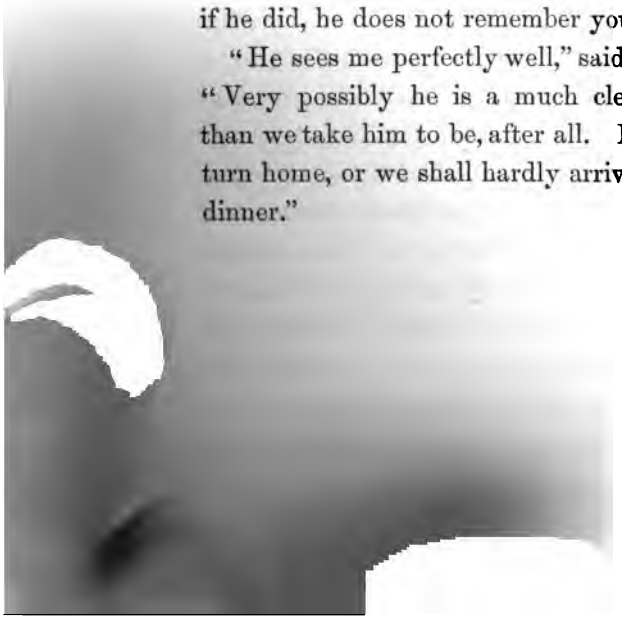
As Edgar Thornbury wished to see the progress which was being made in the railway works, they first bent their steps in that direction. On arriving they found the men about quitting their work. While Edgar was conversing with an engineer's assistant on the length of time which would elapse before the line could be in working order, and on other subjects connected with the operations which were going on, Martha cast her eye on the group of navvies who had collected round a man with two large tin cans, from which he was pouring beer into mugs, for those men who required it. On inspecting the group more narrowly, Martha saw in the midst of them, dressed in the garb of a working-man, though not one of the class employed in railway excavations, the detective who had been living at the Red House since the day following Walter's accident. He seemed to be on perfectly good terms with those around him, drank out of the same mug, and chatted with them with great familiarity. Martha next looked round to see if she could discover the gigantic navvy, Bill Smithers, whom she had seen the day before Walter's accident on her

visit to the village, amusing his little girl with the bull puppy, which he was setting at her mother. He was not, however, there.

Edgar had finished his conversation with the engineer's assistant, when Martha called his attention to the detective, and the intimacy which appeared to exist between him and the navvies. Edgar, as soon as he recognised him, advanced towards the group and nodded to him, but the detective only returned the salutation with a glance of vacant surprise or stolid indifference, and taking no notice whatever of Edgar, continued his conversation with the men around him.

"I don't think he saw you," said Martha, "or if he did, he does not remember you."

"He sees me perfectly well," said her brother. "Very possibly he is a much cleverer fellow than we take him to be, after all. Now, let's return home, or we shall hardly arrive in time for dinner."



CHAPTER III.

CONVALESCENCE.

IN consequence of the rapid improvement made by Walter during the last two days, Martha no longer made any objection to the nurse sitting up with him at night, especially as she appeared perfectly competent to perform the duties she had undertaken. On rising the second morning, Martha's first visit was, of course, to the sick-room, where she had the satisfaction of finding her nephew not only better, but his mind seemed so completely restored, and he was so willing to enter into conversation, that for fear of disobeying the doctor's injunctions not to allow him to talk, she left the room, and joined her brother and his wife at the breakfast-table. During their meal Martha was rather silent and abstracted, which, however, was little noticed by either Edgar or Mrs. Thornbury, who were conversing together on their future plans and movements. Mrs. Thornbury asked her husband, in

case Walter improved as rapidly as he had done during the last two days, how soon it would be before he thought of leaving for Calcutta. To this he replied that it was impossible for him to give any definite answer till the next mail from India was in, and that would be due in a few days. Walter's accident, he said, might probably upset all his plans, for if it should turn out as the doctor and the Inspector believed, that the wound Walter had received was not the result of accident, but of an attack purposely made either with the intention of robbery, or from private feeling, he was determined, he said, to spare neither expense nor exertion to have the villains punished, but how long it would be before they were apprehended it would be impossible to say.

Although Martha took but little part in the conversation, she was by no means inattentive to many portions of it, especially those that related to her brother's determination to punish the offenders, in which she fully agreed, as she now no longer believed Morecombe to be in any manner implicated in the transaction. She again went over in her mind the arguments which the day before had appeared so conclusive of his innocence, and finding no flaw in any of them, she resolved after breakfast to ask her brother

for a cheque for fifty pounds. Then, as the morning was fine, and Walter going on so well, she would drive over to X—— and register her letter to Morecombe, and then pay a visit to Fanny Keats.

When breakfast was over Martha followed her brother into the library, and asked him for the cheque.

"Why, Martha," he said, laughing, "what can you again require money for so soon? It is not ten days since I gave you a cheque for fifty pounds, and now you require another. If you go on in this manner, you will soon be overdrawing your account, and that, remember, I do not intend allowing to be done with impunity."

"Don't be afraid, Edgar, I am too good a manager and economist to do anything of the kind," said Martha, answering her brother in the same tone. "I have still a balance of one hundred and fifty pounds left in your hands, and that after I have cashed the cheque I now ask for."

"Come, Martha, tell me candidly what you want the money for; I am sure there's some mystery in it, is there not?"

Martha gave rather a clumsy, evasive sort of answer, which her brother did not notice at the

time, being occupied in writing out the cheque. When he had finished he held it in his hand, and looking in her face, said,

"Come, Martha, now do tell me the truth, what is the money for?"

"Being my banker, you have no more right to question me on the subject," said Martha, "than your banker has to question you in what manner you intend applying the money you draw from him. Now give me the cheque, there's a good fellow."

"Martha, tell me candidly, is it to assist the Welsh curate?" asked Edgar, who, having but one subject of joke against his sister, seemed determined to wear it threadbare. "If so, take it and welcome. But remember, if he is married now, and his wife should hear of your correspondence with him, you might make her feel very uneasy."

"How stupid you are, Edgar," said Martha, with great truthfulness; and then, snatching the cheque from his hand, and laughing in spite of herself, she left the room.

By the time Martha had equipped herself for her drive, the pony-chaise came to the door; for Edgar had hired one for her use from a farmer in the neighbourhood, her own chaise not having

been mended, nor the pony sufficiently recovered from his bruised condition, to be taken out as usual.

Martha now drove off, and on passing the spot where Walter had been found so dreadfully wounded a few days before, she pulled up her pony, and giving the reins to her little groom (who seemed delighted again to resume his place beside his mistress), she quitted the chaise, and examined the ground. Although the last few days had been dry, and there was now no water in the ditch, she could still plainly distinguish the ledge on which Walter was stretched, and she now trembled to think how little more had been required to cause his death. After uttering a short mental prayer of gratitude for his escape, she endeavoured to trace the marks of the wheels, which she did with tolerable accuracy, and could not disguise from herself the strong probability that the pony had been forced into the ditch, and that his being there was not the result of accident. She now returned to her chaise, and drove on till she had reached the turnpike gates, when her old friend, Mr. Carter, the general shopkeeper, who had seen her approaching, rushed round to the door and bowed respectfully to her. Although there

was nothing at the time Martha wished to purchase of him, she drew up to the house and had a few words of conversation with him.

"Glad to see you out again, ma'am. It's some time since I've seen you pass now."

"Yes—I have not been to X—— for several days," said Martha. "I suppose you heard of the dreadful accident we have had?"

"I did indeed, ma'am; and very sorry I was to hear it. I hope the gentleman's better."

"Thank you, he is much better," said Martha.

"At first we heard it was Mr. Thornbury himself, instead of his nephew, and that he had been robbed of a very large sum of money; but I hope that ain't true, ma'am, is it?'

"No," said Martha, "it is not. My nephew lost nothing; although, if he had been attacked by robbers, they could easily have plundered him of everything he had."

"What account does he give of it, ma'am?"

"He is too ill yet to be asked any questions on the subject, but I hope in a few days we shall know more about it," said Martha, who had not yet heard of the contemplated visit of the Inspector of Police that day to question him.

"However, ma'am, if he's lost nothing, I think that's pretty clear proof it must have been an

accident. I should have been sorry if it had been otherwise, for I always hoped we were pretty clear of bad characters in these parts."

Her customary chat with Mr. Carter being over, Martha drove onwards to X——, and putting up her pony, she sent her little groom back on foot to the Red House, and told him to return for her in the afternoon, as she intended to remain at Mr. Keats' till then. Martha now went to the bank, to get her cheque cashed.

"How will you have it, ma'am?" asked the cashier, with whom Martha was in the habit ot having a few words of conversation when she had been there on similar occasions.

"I'll take one note only, if you please," said Martha.

"I hope Mr. Thornbury is better this morning?" said the cashier, handing her the note.

"I am happy to say he is much better," said Martha. "Dr. Wilson considers him almost out of danger."

"I am very glad to hear it. The news caused great excitement when it first reached us. It was stated that Mr. Thornbury the elder had been accidentally thrown out of his chaise and killed. In fact, you will see in the county paper, published the day before yesterday, the news of his death."

"I am very happy to say it is not the case," said Martha.

"I did not know," said the cashier, "that Mr. Thornbury had a son?"

"He has not," said Martha, now getting uneasy on the subject; "it was his nephew, who arrived from India last year."

When Martha left the bank, she waited for a few moments, to determine what steps she would next take—whether to call on Fanny Keats at once, or pay a visit first to Mrs. Wilson, the doctor's wife. She resolved on adopting the latter course, not only as Mrs. Wilson's was the nearest house, but because the idea occurred to her that she could there write her letter, and enclose the money to Morecombe with greater facility than at the Keatses'. Fanny might naturally be curious to know to whom she was writing, and would offer to accompany her to the post-office, when she would see her register the letter; while at Mrs. Wilson's she could write without any inconvenience or questions being asked on the subject. Fortunately she found the doctor's wife at home, and after their first greeting the conversation of course turned on Walter and the danger he had been in.

"I am very curious to know the truth of the

matter, I must confess," said Mrs. Wilson. "Unfortunately, the Inspector could not go with my husband to-day."

"The Police Inspector!" said Martha—"why should he call at the Red House to-day? Has he heard anything fresh?"

"Not a word that I know of," said Mrs. Wilson. "But my husband considers your nephew so much improved that he may be questioned upon the subject without danger—that is to say, if it is done with moderation."

"Well," said Martha, "I really don't understand Dr. Wilson's reasoning in the matter, I must own. He will not allow poor Fanny Keats to visit Walter, and yet without difficulty gives permission to the Inspector to do so. Really of the two, I think Fanny's presence less likely to do harm than the policeman's."

"I should have thought so too," said Mrs. Wilson; "but, you know, we must not go against the doctor's orders. Are you sure, however, that my husband will longer prohibit Fanny Keats seeing him? If you meet him to-day, you had better ask him."

"I do not like to interfere," said Martha, somewhat sheepishly. "It does not become an old maid to put herself forward in such matters."

"Oh! nonsense," said Mrs. Wilson. "You speak to him about it, and I will attack him too, and it will be hard if, between us, we cannot get over him. These old doctors have no sympathy for love affairs. Are you going to the Keatses' now?"

"Yes," said Martha, "I am; but first, I want to ask you to let me write a letter here, so that I can post it on my road to the Close."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Wilson. "I will send for some paper and envelopes immediately."

"Oh! if you have none in the house," said Martha, "I won't trouble you, but will write my letter at the Keatses'."

"I've plenty of paper in the house," said Mrs. Wilson, "but it happens to be all black-bordered, as we are in mourning for an aunt of mine who died a short time since."

"Oh! that will do very well," said Martha—"do not trouble yourself to send for any other. It is not a letter of any importance."

Mrs. Wilson now brought out her writing-case, and having placed everything in readiness for Martha to write her letter, she left the room for a short time. It was some minutes after her departure before Martha could decide in what manner to address Morecombe. At first

she thought of telling him of the terrible accident which had befallen Walter, but, on reflection, she gave that up. She remembered how little real love most probably existed in him for his son, though, if she should be mistaken in this, it might induce Morecombe again to visit the locality, when doubtless there would be a collision between him and her brother. Martha next thought whether she should write him a letter full of good advice, begging him, from the love he bore his children, to change his course of life, and do nothing more to cast a stain upon his name; but then she remembered that Walter no longer bore the name of Morecombe, but that of Thornbury. She now turned over in her mind whether she should inform him of the change of name, but dreading lest he might consider it as an affront, and refuse to carry out his promise, it would, after all, be more prudent, she thought, to be silent on the subject. Martha remained in doubt for a long time what style of letter she would write, but at last the entrance of Mrs. Wilson into the room recalled her to the necessity of deciding without delay.

"I am sorry to disturb you," said Mrs. Wilson, "but it will only be for a moment. I want

to get a letter which I received yesterday out of my desk,—shall I be in your way if I take it?"

"Not at all," said Martha, making room for her.

Mrs. Wilson now opened the desk, and taking out the letter she wanted, was on the point of again leaving the room, when her eye fell on the fifty-pound note Martha had just received from the banker, and which was on the desk.

"I hope," she said, "you are not going to send such a sum as that by post. Suppose it was stolen?"

"Oh! I shall register it," said Martha, somewhat vexed at the note having been seen by Mrs. Wilson. "It will be safe enough."

"It's dangerous, for all that," said Mrs. Wilson, as she left the room.

Martha now came to the conclusion that her better plan would be to say as little as possible to Morecombe, and she merely wrote on a sheet of note-paper—

"Enclosed is a bank-note for fifty pounds. I have kept my promise faithfully, and I trust you will as faithfully keep yours.

"M. T."

Having sealed and addressed the letter,

Martha, after a little further conversation with Mrs. Wilson, bade her good-bye; and then, quitting the house, directed her steps towards the post-office, where she registered her letter, and started off for the Close. She found only Fanny at home, Mr. Keats having gone to attend to his duties as Justice of the Peace, while Mrs. Keats with the other daughters was absent shopping, Fanny herself having no inclination to go with them. As she and Martha had not met since Walter's accident, it may easily be imagined their meeting was a most affectionate one. After the first effusions were over, Fanny, fearing that her mother and sisters might return and interrupt the conversation she wished to have with Martha, took the latter into her bedroom and bolted the door, that they might not be disturbed.

Their conversation of course turned at once on Walter, the danger he had undergone, and the great improvement he had made during the last day or two.

"In fact, my dear," said Martha, "Dr. Wilson now considers him out of danger."

"Then pray why am I not allowed to see him?" said Fanny, somewhat angrily.

"My dear Fanny, it's no fault of mine," said

Martha. "If I had my will you should see him to-day. At the same time, you know, we must not go against a doctor's orders. Suppose when Dr. Wilson calls to-day, as he usually does after seeing Walter, you put the question to him yourself."

"I hardly like to do so," replied Fanny. "Will you do it for me, and I will put in a word if I find an opportunity?"

"Certainly I will," replied Martha, "with great pleasure. I have already been speaking on the subject with Mrs. Wilson, and she has promised to attack him too. Do not think, dear Fanny, that I have been putting any impediment in the way, for I assure you it would give me much pleasure to have you with me. Now tell me how you like the idea of becoming Mrs. Thornbury instead of Mrs. Morecombe?"

"Like it?" said Fanny—"why, immensely. How can you doubt it? I have a great respect for the name of Thornbury, and very little for that of Morecombe, from the few hints papa has let drop respecting poor Walter's father. Some of these days I shall ask you to tell me more about him."

"My dear Fanny," said Martha, "the fewer questions you ask respecting him the better; and

as Walter has now changed his name there is even less occasion for it than ever."

"Well, I don't wish to inquire into a disagreeable subject," said Fanny. "He is dead and gone now, so perhaps you are right, and the less said about him the better."

A ring at the bell, and the voices of Mrs. Keats and the others entering the house called Fanny's attention from the embarrassment she might have perceived on Martha's countenance. Their conversation having now lasted for more than an hour, Fanny unbolted the door of her bedroom, and they then joined Mrs. Keats and the family below. They were, of course, all very pleased to see Martha, and numberless were the questions put to her; but as the most interesting of her answers have already come before the reader, there is no need to repeat them.

A happier group than were assembled that afternoon in Mr. Keats' house could hardly be imagined. Mr. Keats had soon returned home from the town-hall after exercising his functions as a Justice of the Peace, and about two o'clock in the afternoon Dr. Wilson joined the party, to inform them of Walter's progress after his visit to the Red House. He told them that he could now

unhesitatingly pronounce Walter to be out of danger, and that he had so little fear of a relapse that he intended that morning to have taken the Inspector of Police with him to question Walter about the accident, but unfortunately he was unable to go, as he was obliged to attend before the Justices, it being their day of meeting."

"That is quite true," said Mr. Keats; "he was with us the whole of the morning."

"Well, it is no matter," said Dr. Wilson; "to-morrow he has promised to go with me, and then I hope we shall know more about this mysterious affair."

"But pray," said Martha, obeying a signal from Fanny, "if the Inspector can have an interview with Walter, why may not Fanny?"

"Because," replied the doctor, "in case I find anything like irritability or excitement (which possibly might occur), I should order that functionary out of the room without the slightest hesitation, and he would have sense enough to see the necessity of obeying me, which I am by no means persuaded would be the case with my fair friend here. However, I have no wish to act cruelly in the matter. As a general rule, I like to avoid all causes of excitement in a patient suffering from concussion of the brain till after the tenth

day, but so rapid has been the progress of Walter, that I promise, in case he supports his interview with the Inspector without difficulty, I will give full permission for Miss Keats to see him the following day. Now I hope you will admit this is very liberal behaviour on my part?"

"But why not to-morrow?" asked Martha, obeying a sign from Fanny, rather than acting from any impulse of her own, for in reality she quite coincided with Dr. Wilson.

"Because one cause of excitement will be enough for one day," said the doctor; "for remember, in his present state there is still the possibility of a relapse."

Fanny now made another sign to Martha, which the latter declined to obey, and remained silent.

The doctor, noticing it, said to her,

"Now don't be angry, Miss Keats. I assure you I am acting for the best."

"Nonsense," said Fanny, her temper now fairly giving way. "Acting for the best indeed! I should like it explained why my presence would be more likely to be injurious than that of the policeman! It's not common sense to imagine it, and Miss Thornbury knows it," she continued, turning round angrily to Martha,

"although she sits there and won't say a word."

"But, my dear Fanny," said Martha, "how am I to blame? I don't see what I can do."

"And you, mamma," said Fanny, now beginning to cry, "why don't you take my part?"

"My dear," said her mother meekly, "Dr. Wilson must know best. I cannot interfere."

"Go if you please to-morrow," said the doctor to Fanny, "I shall not attempt further to hinder you. Only remember, I wash my hands of all responsibility in the matter."

"Yes," said Fanny, bursting into tears, "and then if he is worse you will say it is all my fault. I don't believe I have a friend in the world."

Poor Fanny now cried so bitterly, that Martha, putting her arm round her, led her out of the room, and attempted to console her, but it was of no use. Fanny would not be comforted. She even accused Martha of making out Walter worse than he really was, solely that she might have the pleasure of nursing him herself. Martha attempted to persuade Fanny she was in error, but in vain, although she continued with her not only till long after Dr. Wilson had left, but till a servant had knocked at the bed-room door to say that Martha's little

groom had arrived, and wished to know what time his mistress would order the pony-chaise to be ready.

"As soon as possible," Martha replied, somewhat sharply; and rising from her seat beside Fanny, she was upon the point of leaving the room, when a sudden change of feeling came over the latter.

She now advanced towards Martha, and flinging her arms round her neck and kissing her affectionately, begged she would forgive her froward behaviour. Martha returned her embrace, and the two were about to leave the room together, when Fanny, woman-like, glanced at herself in the looking-glass, said to Martha:

"No, I won't go with you; my eyes are so red, everybody will laugh at me, and I should deserve it, too. Good-bye, dear, you are not angry with me now, are you?"

"No, I am not," said Martha. "Remember the day after to-morrow I shall come for you, so have your things packed up in readiness, as I shall not let you leave me again for a few days."

Then kissing Fanny once more, she left the room, and joined the family downstairs.

Shortly afterwards the pony-chaise came to

the door, and wishing them all good-bye, Martha stepped into it, and drove rapidly home to the Red House.

The next morning Martha found Walter much better. He entered into conversation with her about Fanny, which Martha at first endeavoured to avoid, but finding his intellect as clear as her own, as well as perfect facility in diction, she disregarded all injunctions of the doctor, and conversed with him about his betrothed till it was time for her to descend to the breakfast-room. The conversation here turned chiefly on the visit of Dr. Wilson and the Inspector, who were expected that morning, and what steps should be taken to find the perpetrators of the crime, for Walter had already let drop a few remarks which led them to believe he had been attacked by assassins. Of course Edgar Thornbury bore the principal part in the conversation, his wife and sister being unable to pass an opinion upon the subject, both, however, devoutly hoping that the miscreants would be punished.

About noon the doctor, accompanied by the Inspector, drove up to the house; and Edgar Thornbury, who had been anxiously awaiting their arrival, advanced to meet them as they entered the hall.

"Well, doctor," said Edgar, "I have much pleasure in informing you that your patient is going on in a most satisfactory manner. I do not pretend to be a judge in matters of the kind, but from what I saw of him this morning, he appears to be as capable of undergoing a cross-examination as I am myself."

"Very possibly," said Dr. Wilson. "I am very glad to hear it. At the same time I should like to see him, and dress the wound before the Inspector goes into the room."

"Perhaps it would be better," said the Inspector, "as I should like to see the man I left here first. I suppose I can do so, sir?" he continued, addressing Mr. Thornbury.

"Certainly," said Edgar. "You will find him in the stable-yard talking with some men; at least I saw him there a few minutes ago."

Dr. Wilson now went upstairs to Walter's room, followed by Martha, and found his patient, as he had anticipated, considerably better. He then commenced dressing the wound, and had long completed his duties in the sick-room before the Inspector had finished his conversation with the detective. He had called him apart from the other men; and they then carried on a somewhat lengthy and secret conversation

together, but whether the Inspector obtained any information from his man it would be impossible to say. Dr. Wilson was now becoming rather impatient at the delay, and sent for the Inspector.

It was very probable that the detective had given the Inspector some unexpected news, for when he returned to the house on receiving the doctor's message, his step was slow and deliberate, and he stopped more than once to reflect on some subject which was intensely occupying his thoughts. On arriving in Walter's room, however, his brow cleared, and after a few preliminary, unimportant questions he asked Walter if he would give him some particulars of the manner in which the accident occurred.

Walter, who had been propped up in bed with pillows, replied that he had but very little to tell, beyond the fact that he had suddenly been attacked by two men he knew nothing of. After leaving X—— he had driven without much difficulty, although the night was very dark, and the rain poured heavily down, as far as the "Brickmakers' Arms;" but when he had turned from the high road into the one which led to the Red House, the obscurity became so dense, on account of the high trees, that he was

obliged to keep the pony hardly above a walk, that he might not drive him either into the ditch on one side, or the hedge on the other. He had passed the "Brickmakers' Arms" about ten minutes, when a man suddenly seized the pony's head, and attempted to push him towards the ditch; while Walter, on his part, by pulling the off rein, made every effort to stop him, calling out at the time to his assailant, to know who he was and what he meant by such behaviour. Instead of replying to Walter, the man still continued to thrust the pony towards the ditch, and called out to another, whom Walter did not see, "D—— you, be quick, will you."

As the man had evidently addressed some one behind the chaise, Walter was on the point of looking round, when his hat fell off, and immediately afterwards he received a violent blow on the side of the head, which rendered him completely insensible, and he remembered nothing more till he found himself in his bedroom at the Red House.

The Inspector here inquired whether his hat had fallen off accidentally, but on this point Walter was uncertain, as the agitation of the moment, and the blow which quickly followed, prevented him from clearly remembering how

it occurred. The Inspector next asked him if he could describe the man who seized the pony's head, to which Walter answered, that it was so dark at the time he was unable to notice him.

"Are you certain, sir," continued the Inspector, "that the man who seized the pony was not the same who struck the blow?"

"Of that I am positive," Walter replied. "I am also quite certain that the man still held the pony's head at the moment the blow was struck."

"Do you suspect any one in particular?" inquired the Inspector.

"No one, nor have I the most remote idea who it could be."

"They did not ask you to deliver up your money or watch, or anything, sir?"

"Not a word more passed than what I have told you."

"Excuse my asking the question, sir, but have you had a quarrel with anybody?"

"No one," said Walter.

At this stage of the examination, the doctor, who with Martha and Mrs. Thornbury were present in the room, fancied he saw symptoms of fatigue in his patient, and not willing to increase them, asked the Inspector if he had

received enough information for that day.

"Yes, sir," said the Inspector, "I don't think we need trouble the gentleman any further at present. We will, if you please, now go down stairs, and talk over the matter together." Then bidding Walter good morning, and hoping that the next time he came he should find him better, he quitted the room with the two gentlemen, leaving Martha in it.

When they had entered the library, and closed the door after them, Edgar Thornbury asked the Inspector if he had any clue to the perpetrators of the attack on his nephew.

"Well, sir, none at present; but I am not altogether without hopes. I have received no information of anything like a satisfactory description, so that I could act upon it; but you may be certain that it shall be from no lack of zeal and energy on my part if we don't succeed in catching the scoundrels."

"It is very probable that, if my nephew continues to improve, I shall leave England shortly. Before doing so I will leave instructions with Mr. Gregory, my solicitor in X——, to act for me in the matter; unless you think by remaining in England I can be of any service in the cause. In that case I will put off my departure,

for I intend to spare neither expense nor inconvenience to bring the scoundrels to justice."

"Candidly, sir, if you have no reason to suspect any one, and can give me no clue, I don't see any necessity for your remaining. But on this point you had better be quite certain, for very often in affairs like the present one, a disregarded or almost forgotten word will frequently put us on the track of a guilty man. It will be as well, therefore, before you positively determine to leave England, to be certain on that point."

"I have thought most carefully over the matter," said Mr. Thornbury, "and many times too, but I cannot find one single circumstance that even in the most remote manner could assist me in giving you any information. At the same time, be assured of this, that should anything occur to me, even were it on the very day of sailing, I would delay my departure rather than not assist in bringing the villains to justice. Now, as I said before, I shall place the matter in Mr. Gregory's hands, and by way of assisting you and your men in your exertions, you may offer a reward of two hundred pounds for their detection and apprehension; and between ourselves, Mr. Inspector, a cheque for

fifty pounds extra shall be yours if you succeed in bringing the miscreants to justice. Understand me, that the last sum is solely between our two selves, and not to appear in any printed notice or any step you may take in the matter. Of course I do not include our friend, the doctor, here, as I am perfectly certain our secret will be safe in his hands."

The Inspector thanked Mr. Thornbury for his liberality, and assured him no exertions should be wanting on his part to trace the men who had attacked his nephew. He then asked Mr. Thornbury whether in future he should communicate with Mr. Gregory; and having received a reply in the affirmative, he bade them good morning, telling the doctor he should prefer returning to X—— on foot, so as to have a little more conversation with the detective by the way.

For some time after the departure of the Inspector, Dr. Wilson remained conversing with Edgar Thornbury on the condition of Walter, and the probability of his recovery.

"I have not," said the doctor, "any apprehension whatever of a change for the worse occurring. If to-morrow when I call I find he has suffered no inconvenience from his inter-

view with the Inspector, I shall unhesitatingly say that, as far as Walter is concerned, there is not the slightest reason why you should delay your departure. On the points mentioned by the Inspector, you alone can be able to form an opinion whether there is any necessity for your stopping."

"On that subject," replied Edgar, "I have long since made up my mind. I know of nothing whatever that can throw a light on the matter; and shall not worry myself more about it. To tell you the truth, I am anxious to leave England as soon as I can, that I may return the sooner. I shall give full instructions to spare no expense in the matter; and I sincerely hope that justice in this case will not fail."

The doctor said he hoped that at the latest in three days he might be able to pronounce Walter convalescent, from all but the wound in his head, and that was rapidly healing. He was then upon the point of saying good-bye, when Martha came into the room.

"I suppose," she said, "Dr. Wilson, you will call in the Close as you return home, shall you not?"

"Certainly," he replied, "I will do so, as soon as I get back to X——. Why do you ask?"

"Because I wish you to tell Miss Keats that I will call to-morrow for her."

"Not till after I have seen my patient, I hope, Miss Thornbury?" said the doctor.

"Yes, even before you have seen your patient," was Martha's reply. "But I will promise you that she shall not see Walter before you do—will that content you?"

"Quite," said Dr. Wilson. "I do not then think there will be the slightest objection to it; but I should like to be certain no inflammatory action has set in from his interview with the Inspector, for I assure you his pulse was far more irritable afterwards than it was before. However, I will do your bidding with Miss Keats. At what time shall I tell her you will call?"

"Say at eleven o'clock."

"That will do very well," replied the doctor. "I shall have seen him first, and be on my road home, and if I offer no objection, in case we should meet as I return to X——, you can let Miss Keats see him. But do not let her fatigue him by too much conversation for a few days to come. Then I hope to give you all liberty to talk as much as you please."

The next morning Martha found Walter considerably better. Indeed, so much so that, ex-

perienced as she was in the management of an invalid, she could easily perceive there would be not the slightest objection to the interview taking place between him and Fanny Keats, and she gave instructions to the nurse to ask Dr. Wilson whether Walter might not be partially dressed, and seated in an easy-chair for a short time during the day. The nurse promised she would do so, and the pony-chaise being in readiness, Martha drove off to X——. When near the turnpike gate she saw the doctor's carriage approaching, and, without stopping, he merely nodded to her as she passed.

On reaching the Close she found Fanny perfectly ready for her, with a small amount of luggage, which could be placed in the chaise. Mr. Keats was also at home, and when his daughter went into the study to bid him farewell, he asked her whether she would not like first to accompany her mother to service in the Cathedral. To which Fanny demurely replied that she was afraid Miss Thornbury would be angry if she was kept waiting. The Reverend gentleman only smiled, but made no further remark. Then Fanny, having bid her parents and sisters good-bye, joined Martha, and they started off immediately for the Red House. On their

road they again met the doctor's carriage, and this time he signalled them to stop.

"I am happy to tell you," he said, "that our invalid is much better this morning, and I have told the nurse to let him be dressed, and you can see him without further let or hindrance on my part. Only take my advice, do not talk too much with him the first few days, as you may retard his recovery."

Fanny muttered some unintelligible reply, looking rather sheepish the while, but Martha assured him explicitly enough that she would keep strict watch, and that he need be under no alarm. Then, touching her pony with the whip, she again started off.

On arriving at the house, Martha first gave Walter notice of Fanny's visit, and then conducted her into his room. When the first greeting between the lovers was over, Fanny looked at Walter attentively for a moment, and then gave way to a silent flood of tears. With those who had been in attendance on him for some days past, and had noticed the gradual improvement in his appearance since the first day of his accident, his present condition was satisfactory in the extreme; but to Fanny, who had last seen him in the full glow of manly health

and spirits, to mark how great the change to the pallid, wan look he then wore, notwithstanding the temporary flush of excitement caused by her presence, was painful indeed. Walter, on his part, became alarmed at Fanny's sorrow, and was evidently upon the point of weeping with her from pure sympathy, when Martha thought it necessary to interpose her authority on the occasion.

"Walter, dear," she said to him, "Dr. Wilson particularly requested that your first interview with Fanny should be a short one, and I think it better you should not prolong it. You can see Fanny again in the afternoon. She's not very well this morning. Come, now, say good-bye to him, Fanny, and you shall see him again later."

Fanny did say good-bye to him, and kissed him affectionately as well; and then Martha, taking her by the hand, led her into her own room, and there, to use the nurse's expressive phraseology, she "let her cry herself out," and she did so completely.

After luncheon in the afternoon, Fanny again paid Walter a visit, and this time their interview was much more satisfactory; nor afterwards, notwithstanding their oft-repeated

interviews (all of which were in the presence of Martha, who, until Walter left his room, always played propriety with the strictest integrity), did the slightest appearance of a relapse take place.

CHAPTER IV.

MARTHA LEAVES THE RED HOUSE.

DURING the next five days Walter's health progressed with so much rapidity that, before a week had elapsed since the arrival of Fanny Keats, he was not only able to leave his room, but had taken more than one short drive with Martha in the pony-chaise, and there was every appearance that at the end of another fortnight he would be able to resume his duties in the office in London. Edgar Thornbury now determined to make up his mind as to the time of his leaving England, and after a long conversation with Dr. Wilson as to Walter's capability of again undertaking the duties of the office, the doctor assured him that, with moderation at the commencement, in a fortnight he could do so with perfect impunity. Edgar then drove over to X——, to have an interview with his solicitor, Mr. Gregory, and the Inspector of Police, relative to the proceed-

ings which should be taken in case the culprits were discovered, as well as to learn whether any intelligence had yet been received of them. Fortunately, on arriving at X——, he found the Inspector in his office, and they went together to Mr. Gregory's to consult on the present state of the affair.

To Edgar Thornbury's inquiry whether any news had been received, the Inspector assured him that he had heard none of a very satisfactory character, although he was not without hope of being in the end successful. He had, he said, faint glimmerings of the track of one of the individuals, of which it would be imprudent to speak, but which he hoped in the end might lead to the discovery. Mr. Thornbury now requested Mr. Gregory to determine whether, as far as he could see in the matter, it would be of any use his remaining in England to assist in the prosecution. Mr. Gregory, in reply, said that he did not see how he could advance the case, even if he did remain, and as he was anxious to leave, he might rest assured every step should be taken as energetically during his absence as if he were present.

Having satisfied himself on that point, Edgar Thornbury next called on Mr. Keats, to in-

form him of the conclusion he had arrived at.

"I am exceedingly sorry," he continued, "that it is likely to retard the marriage of the young couple; but, after all, I think it would be better to delay it for a few months. By the arrival of some letters by the last mail, which were forwarded to me yesterday, I can easily see that not only is my presence required in India as soon as possible, but I hope to return again to England without delay. At any rate, I would not defer the wedding longer than six or eight months; for if I find, on my arrival at Calcutta, that I am likely to be detained there for a longer period, I will leave it entirely in your hands, so that the wedding can take place without my presence, much as I should regret it. After all, perhaps a little delay would not be disadvantageous, as it will give the young people ample time to choose their future residence in London; and they can take greater care over the furnishing of their house, in which I have no doubt they will be ably advised both by Mrs. Keats and Martha."

Mr. Keats readily fell in with Mr. Thornbury's views, stating that the only reason which had induced him to give his consent to the wedding coming off as early as had been de-

cided on before Walter's accident, was that it might take place before Mr. Thornbury left England, but that, for his own part, he should much prefer delaying it a little longer.

"But when do you really think of starting?" continued Mr. Keats.

"I hope to be able to leave England in about a fortnight's time, as my wife tells me that with a little energy she should then be perfectly ready for the voyage. The day after to-morrow I contemplate leaving the Red House, and Mrs. Thornbury will accompany me to London."

"Will Walter remain behind?" inquired Mr. Keats.

"Yes, I purpose leaving him under Martha's care till a week or so before our departure for India, and then if he is well enough she will come up to town with him. Fanny, I trust, will accompany them. I hope you will have no objection to this arrangement?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Keats. "And I consent the more readily, as my wife has a married sister lately arrived from India, who is at present living in London. Fanny will stay with her, but you can meet as often as you please."

Two days afterwards Edgar Thornbury and

his wife quitted the Red House for London, leaving Martha with Walter and Fanny behind. The improvement in Walter's health was now so rapid, that he was able to walk a considerable distance, and had even on one occasion accompanied Martha on foot when she visited her protegées in the village near the railway works, and afterwards to the works themselves. Martha mentioned to Walter the fact of her having, when last there, seen the detective who had been on duty at the house, dressed as an artizan, conversing with a group of navvies, and how her brother had nodded to him, and his pretence of not recognizing him.

"It was really singular," continued Martha, "to notice the perfect command he possessed over his features. He stared at your uncle a moment with a stolid, stupid look, as if he could not understand his behaviour, and then turned round and continued his conversation with those about him, as if under the impression he had been mistaken for some one else."

"He seems to be a curious sort of character," remarked Walter.

"He does indeed," said Martha. "I have not seen a great deal of him myself, and I cannot say I like what I have seen. He is certainly a

very clever actor, though the sooner he goes away the better, for I suspect he is only idling his time here."

"Where is he now?" asked Walter. "I should like to see him."

"That you can easily do when we return," was Martha's reply. "He has a bed-room over the stables, and is generally to be found lounging about the yard."

"Is it not singular," said Walter, "that they can discover nothing whatever of the men who attacked me that night?"

"Very," said Martha. "However, my dear boy, crimes of the kind rarely remain concealed for any length of time. It will come to light some day, you may be certain. Providence, you may be sure, will not allow such a deed to go unpunished, either in this world or the next."

On reaching the Red House, Martha and Walter went round to the stables and inquired for the detective.

"He left here all of a sudden, ma'am, this morning," said the coachman's wife.

"Had he received any particular intelligence?" asked Martha.

"Not that I know of, ma'am; nobody came here to see him that I heard of."

"Do you know where he has gone to?" asked Martha.

"I've not an idea, ma'am. All he said when he went was that he'd be back in a day or so, but he couldn't say when, and I was to have his bed ready for him. He said he possibly might come back in the middle of the night, there's no knowing; but that's all I can tell you about him."

"A mysterious personage indeed," said Walter, as they quitted the stable-yard. "He begins to excite my curiosity amazingly. Do not fail to let me know when he comes back, as I should like to have some conversation with him."

On the day week after Edgar's departure from the Red House, Martha received a letter from him, requesting that she and Walter would come to London the following day, as he had made arrangements to leave England with his wife in a week or ten days. Martha immediately communicated the intelligence to Fanny Keats. Of course the news, which after all was not unexpected, caused a great deal of excitement at the time. Fanny attempted to raise an objection to their going the next day, under the plea that Walter had not visited her parents since his accident, and that he ought to

spend a day at least with them before leaving. Martha at first attempted to combat Fanny's objection, but finding it useless, she suggested that Fanny and Walter should start off at once to X——, and there spend the day with Mr. and Mrs. Keats, and that Walter could remain for the night at their house, and she would call for him the next day on her way to the train.

"I cannot say more than that," she continued, addressing Walter, "for you know, my dear, your uncle is a strict disciplinarian, and will be very angry with me if I fail to carry out his wishes."

Walter admitted there must be no delay, although he regretted the necessity; and Martha, having promised to forward his luggage in the afternoon, the pony-chaise was ordered, and shortly afterwards Walter and Fanny Keats were on their way to the Close.

Martha had now to give orders for packing her own luggage, which was considerably more voluminous than that of her nephew, as it was more than probable she would make a lengthened stay in London; the Red House being left under the charge of Mrs. Watkins, the housekeeper, and the occasional supervision of Mrs. Keats. Martha's luggage being ready by

the afternoon, the greater portion of it was despatched to X——, and then, after luncheon, Martha, having determined to take farewell of her friends in the village, went to her room to make preparations for her walk. When ready, and on the point of leaving the house, a female servant told her that a gentleman was in the drawing-room, and wished to speak to her. Martha asked his name, but the girl said that when she inquired it, she did not clearly understand what he answered. Imagining it might be some gentleman in the neighbourhood, for many had called to inquire after Walter since his accident, Martha entered the room, where she found an elderly man of gentlemanly appearance, and exceedingly well dressed, who at the moment of her entrance was looking out of the window. On hearing her come in, he turned round, when, to Martha's intense astonishment, she recognised Morecombe, although at the first moment, so great was the change in his appearance, she almost doubted his identity. Nor was this much to be wondered at, for it would be difficult to imagine a greater change than had taken place in him since they last met. He had then appeared in the very depths of shabby disreputability, his long iron

grey hair hanging down beside his cheeks, his clothes dirty and almost in rags, and his slouched hat so stained that a beggar would hardly have condescended to wear it. But now he seemed the impersonation of a man of high respectability. He was dressed in a handsome suit of black, which fitted him well, a new hat, with black band round it, and a white cravat, which added to his prepossessing appearance, and gave him the air of some favourite minister of a fashionable London congregation. Seeing Martha's surprise, he advanced towards her, and with admirably affected interest and sympathy in his tone, he said to her,

"I read in the newspapers with great regret, Martha, the terrible accident which had occurred. Although I know your brother bore me no good will, at the same time I was never really his enemy. I know full well I had given him sufficient provocation to justify his feelings towards me. But when I read in the paper last week of his death, I assure you it gave me so severe a shock, that I almost fainted under it, although I am but little given to yield to impressions of the kind."

"My brother's death in the paper last week?" said Martha, possibly doubting whether she

could have understood Morecombe correctly. "Why, no accident has occurred to Edgar, and I received a letter from him only this morning, telling me he was in perfect health."

For some moments Morecombe glanced at Martha, as if utterly unable to comprehend her answer; and then somewhat recovering himself, said to her,

"Why, I saw his death in the paper a week or ten days ago. It said that Mr. Thornbury had met his death by being thrown out of his carriage when driving home on a dark night; and then again the broad black edge on the letter you sent to me also served to convince me of the truth. I should have written or called on you before, but I naturally supposed, in the first burst of grief at the accident, you would pay but little attention to any communication from me. I determined therefore to allow sufficient time to elapse for the funeral to take place, before I came down to offer you my condolence."

"I am happy to say in one respect, Mr. Morecombe, that the statement in the newspaper was incorrect," said Martha. "No accident whatever occurred to my brother, though I am sorry to say the report was not without some

foundation in another respect. Your son Walter had that evening a very narrow escape of his life while driving from X——, not, however, from an accident, but from a deliberate attempt at murder."

Martha's words seemed to have a terrible effect on Morecombe. He first turned deadly pale, then staggered to a chair, and clutching it for support, seemed hardly able to hold himself erect.

"Martha," he said, "you perfectly terrify me! Did I understand you that it was Walter who had been attacked?"

"Yes," replied Martha; "and it was only by the mercy of Providence that he escaped with his life."

"Excuse me," said Morecombe, seating himself in a chair and pressing his brow with his hand, "excuse me for a moment, I feel very unwell."

"Shall I ring for a glass of water?" said Martha, seeing he was on the point of fainting.

"No, no," said Morecombe, making an impatient gesture with his left hand. "I shall be better presently. It will go off directly—I've no doubt."

Morecombe, however, did not recover as rapid-

ly as he anticipated; and it was some minutes before he regained his self-possession; while Martha during the time stood by watching him attentively, possibly with some sympathy for the feeling he shewed at the danger his son had been in. At last Morecombe, rising from his seat, said to her,

"How is it that the mistake occurred in the name?"

"It was not altogether a mistake," said Martha, "for Walter had decided on dropping the name of Morecombe, and taking that of Thornbury instead."

Morecombe made no remark, but looking at Martha with a bewildered expression said, "Did I understand you that it is imagined Walter's accident—as I trust it was—was the work of assassins?"

"Yes," replied Martha.

"Did they rob him?"

"No; and that is a very singular feature in the case," replied Martha. "He lost nothing whatever."

"Then of course," said Morecombe, "it must have been an accident. I wonder," he continued angrily, "how you can possibly imagine it to have been anything else. I hope you have

done all you could to deny such a foolish tale. Why, it would almost carry the impression that Walter had misconducted himself in some way, and that it was the effect of private revenge."

"I was as unwilling at first to believe it was other than an accident as yourself," said Martha, "but unfortunately there is but too much reason to be convinced of the truth."

"And what reason may I ask?" said Morecombe, indignantly. "What reason can there be?"

"In the first place," said Martha, "Dr. Wilson who attended him distinctly stated that the wound on his head was caused by some sharp instrument, and could not have been done either by a blow from the pony's hoof, or by the wheel of the chaise; and the Police Inspector was equally certain that the blow must have been inflicted while he was in an erect position."

Although Morecombe was fast recovering his energies, he still remained deadly pale, and heavy drops of perspiration started out on his brow, while Martha noticed his hand tremble as he raised it to wipe them off.

"What nonsense!" he said. "Of course the Inspector of Police wants a job. What those fellows are, is pretty well known now."

"But all doubt on the matter," continued Martha, "was set at rest by Walter's own evidence, when he recovered the use of his senses."

"And what did he say?" inquired Morecombe, glancing anxiously at Martha as she spoke.

"That one of the villains seized hold of his pony's head, and attempted to thrust him into the ditch; while the other from behind struck him a tremendous blow, which rendered him insensible."

"And what sort of a man was he that seized the pony's head?" asked Morecombe, evidently acutely interested in her answer.

"It was so dark he could not see," said Martha, "but he thinks he should recognize the voice, if ever he met him and heard him speak."

"His voice?" said Morecombe, "why, what did he say, then?"

"Nothing to Walter, but he called out to the man behind to strike the blow."

Morecombe, who had again seated himself in the chair, remained silent for some moments, with his eyes cast down as if endeavouring to collect his thoughts on some particular point. Then suddenly raising his gaze on Martha, he

said to her, "Have they any suspicions, Martha, who were the men that attacked Walter?"

"I can hardly tell," said Martha, "what the Inspector of Police thinks, for he is very mysterious on the subject."

"Go on, go on," said Morecombe impatiently.

Martha, somewhat surprised at his earnestness, said, "Well, if you insist on my telling you the truth, his first suspicions fell on you, but"—

"Fell on me!" said Morecombe, interrupting her before she could finish the sentence. "Fell on me, indeed! Why, what nonsense! I should like to know why they should fall on me. At any rate, Martha, I hope you have put a stop to that accusation. Fell on me! why, I can prove that I was in London before the accident occurred. After I left you the day I last saw you I wandered about the town till the four o'clock train was about starting, and then took my place in it. Now remember, Martha, if anybody speaks to you about it again, that I wanted to pay for my place with one of the ten-pound notes you had given me, and the clerk couldn't give me change, and I was obliged to wait till he had it. I was very angry with him, and explained myself tolerably forcibly to him. If the

Inspector of Police ever says anything more about me you can refer him to that fact."

"Do you wish me to tell him so?" said Martha, coolly, and somewhat sternly, for she began to be considerably puzzled at his behaviour.

"No, no, certainly not. Only in case you have the opportunity of doing so—incidentally in conversation—it might be as well to ask him whether the person he suspected had not gone up to London by either of the trains, and which."

"I will do so," said Martha.

Morecombe remained silent for a few moments, and then said,

"Are they taking any steps in the matter now, Martha? I suppose," he continued, looking at her anxiously, "they have given it up, haven't they?"

"No," said Martha, "quite the contrary. I understand they are making inquiries in every direction; and not only has my brother employed a solicitor in X——, who assures him no means shall be wanting to find out the villains, but the Inspector of Police, possibly stimulated by the liberal reward my brother has offered for their discovery, told him a few days since that he had by no means given up all hopes, but, on the contrary, felt confident of success."

"And where is Walter now?" inquired Morecombe.

"He is spending the day with the Keats, and will accompany me to London to-morrow, for, thank God, he is sufficiently recovered to attend to business."

"I should like to know," said Morecombe, "what steps the Inspector has taken."

"I cannot tell you," said Martha; "but if you wish to know, I will send for the detective, who is living on the premises. I think he returned last night, after having been absent a day or two. I will ring the bell and inquire, and if he is here you can question him yourself."

"No, no, Martha," said Morecombe, advancing to arrest her hand as she was on the point of ringing the bell. "No, no, I don't want to make any inquiries of him. Well," he continued, gazing at her, and evidently thinking at the time of something else, "I am glad things are not so bad as I anticipated. I beg your pardon, Martha, but, after all, I'll have a glass of water, if you will let me. I've not been very well lately."

"Certainly," said Martha, as she rang the bell, and ordered the servant to bring a glass of water.

"He will not be long, I hope, I am rather in a hurry."

"No," said Martha. "Do you wish to catch the train back to London?"

"Yes, I shall hurry back as fast as I can, since I can be of no use here. Good-bye, Martha."

"Won't you stop till the water comes?"

"Oh! yes," he said, "I beg your pardon. I'm sure, Martha, I'm very much obliged to you for the care and attention you have shown Walter, for you have been his nurse, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have," said Martha, "almost the whole time, and a terrible shock it has been to me, I can assure you."

At this moment the servant entered the room, and Morecombe drank off the water.

"Good-bye," he said, "once more. I must hurry off to the train as fast as I can." So saying, he quitted Martha, and proceeded rapidly down the gravel road to the lodge, and was soon lost to sight.

After Morecombe had left, Martha was for a long time exceedingly puzzled to understand the reason of his visit. She felt some sympathy with him, it is true, for the effect her announcement of the attack on Walter had made on him. Still, there were many points connected with his

conversation which puzzled her exceedingly. Nor did they become clearer as she thought over them; on the contrary, the longer she dwelt on the subject, the more inexplicable did many parts of it appear. That he felt sorrow at the treatment his son had received was certain, and yet he felt almost angry at the steps which were being taken to discover the would-be assassins. Then, again, the hurried manner in which he had taken his departure also seemed mysterious to her. She could come, however, to no conclusion on the matter, so intricate did it appear, and she resolved, if possible, to dismiss it from her mind, and not think of it again till later in the day, when she hoped to be able to take it up more coolly than she could at the moment.

Martha now quitted the house, and went to the village, where she spent the remainder of the afternoon in visiting the cottages. As she was returning home, she took the same road through the narrow wooded lane where she had had her first interview with Morecombe; and she had hardly reached the spot where it had taken place, than she saw him emerge from the thick brushwood by the side, as if he had been expecting her arrival.

Martha, who, from the hurried manner in

which he had quitted her, doubtless imagined he had long since arrived in London, was so startled at his appearance, that she stopped short in her path, and gazed at him as if bewildered. Before she recovered herself, Morecombe, noticing the intense surprise, and even alarm on her countenance, said to her, in a tone so low as almost to approach a whisper—

"Do not be frightened, Martha, but I want to have a few words with you before you go further."

"Mr. Morecombe," said Martha, "how is it you are here? You told me when you left that you were in a hurry to get back to London."

"So I was, but I missed my train," replied Morecombe. "And then afterwards what you told me in the morning made so strong an impression on me, that I thought I would, if possible, take the opportunity of seeing you again to speak about it. I hope, if ever you hear the Inspector or anybody else make allusions to me as having been concerned in the matter, you will attempt to prove the impossibility of such a thing. I don't mean, of course, by mentioning my name, or anything of the kind; but you must admit it would be a dreadful thing for me to be suspected even for a mo-

ment of an attempt to murder my own son."

"Certainly," said Martha—"I do admit it. Remember, however, that no one ever dreams of the relationship between you, and therefore you may make your mind easy on that point."

"No; but if I were arrested on the charge, our relationship would be known, and you yourself have a very strong objection to that becoming public. Then, again, could anything be more horrible than the idea of my son being in the witness-box, and bearing evidence against me—although, of course, his evidence would fall to the ground."

"Horrible, indeed!" said Martha.

"As I told you before, I went back by the four o'clock train, and could easily bring forward the clerk to prove the conversation I had with him about the note. He will remember it perfectly well, as I was very indignant at the suspicious manner he looked at it, forgetting at the time that, from the poverty-stricken appearance I then had, his suspicions might not be unreasonable. You see, I am strong enough on that point, Martha; still, as I said before, it would be a most painful thing both for Walter and myself to make these explanations public."

"But I think I told you, Mr. Morecombe, that

suspicions no longer bore on you," said Martha.

"Of course not—why should they?—or, if they did arise, they must naturally now have vanished. All I want is to avoid publicity, and you must see that yourself," he said, somewhat testily. "You don't know what steps they are taking now, do you?"

"I know nothing about it," said Martha, "with the exception that my brother has placed the affair in the hands of a solicitor in X——, and the Inspector, as well as the detective, are busily engaged in making inquiries on the subject."

"Oh! that detective—is he still at the Red House?"

"I really don't know," said Martha, "but I heard he had returned."

"Didn't I understand you to say that a large reward had been offered for the apprehension of the miscreants?"

"Yes," said Martha, "and so large, they say, as greatly to stimulate the exertions of the police."

"Have you seen any of the printed bills?"

"No, I believe they are not yet printed," replied Martha. "But it is getting late, Mr. Morecombe, and I will no longer detain you."

"One word more, Martha. Can you tell me the reason the bills are not yet printed?"

"I do not know," said Martha. "I have made no inquiries about them. Everything is left in the hands of the Inspector, who gives but little information."

Martha was now about to continue her road, when Morecombe said,

"One moment longer, Martha. As I expect to leave for America in three or four days, it will be useless your sending any other letters to my address."

"Mr. Morecombe," said Martha, "I have not the slightest intention of addressing you again on any subject. If you have a spark of honour left, I expect you will keep your word and leave England. Now you know your son is out of danger, there can be no reason for your delay." And so saying, Martha passed onwards, while Morecombe plunged into the brushwood by the side of the road and disappeared.

The two interviews she had had that day with Morecombe not only haunted Martha during the whole of the evening, but kept her awake many hours after she had retired to rest. Why he should have called at the Red House to make inquiries respecting her brother, when he knew

perfectly well that Edgar had for him the strongest personal ill-feeling, was a mystery she could not solve. Then again she remembered the terrible effect the news that Walter had been the victim instead of her brother had on him, which showed that the man, infamous as he was, could not be destitute of feeling for his child. She could not understand why he should so hurriedly have determined on quitting the house to catch the train, as he must have known the hour it started perfectly well before he arrived. His whole stay in the house had not exceeded half an hour, yet he appeared in no hurry when he came. Her interview with him on her return from the village had also many incomprehensible points in it. It was natural he should feel horror at the idea of being suspected of attempting the murder of his own son; but it appeared to her that he was more anxious upon that subject than upon the danger Walter had undergone. But possibly what more than all struck her was Morecombe's unnaturally excited manner during the interview in the lane, and this appeared the stronger, as he was usually calm and self-possessed, even when out of temper, whereas in his conversation with her he had even seemed great-

ly bewildered. At last she determined if possible to think no more upon the subject, but to take it up again the next morning, when her brain would be clearer, and she would be more likely to arrive at a just conclusion. The next morning, however, Martha had so many orders and instructions to give the servants previous to her departure, and other occupations incidental to leaving home for a considerable time, that she had no leisure to resume the train of thought which had occupied her so intently the evening before.

Just before leaving the house, after making her final preparations, Martha had to receive a visitor, no other than the Inspector of Police.

"I am sorry to trouble you, ma'am," he said to her when they were alone and the door closed, "but I much wanted to ask you a question or two, if you will allow me."

"Does it relate to anything connected with my nephew?" inquired Martha.

"Possibly it may, indirectly, ma'am," said the Inspector, "but I am not quite certain that it does. Might I ask if you've lost anything lately?"

"Nothing that I'm aware of," replied Martha. "Why do you inquire?"

"I mean money, ma'am," said the Inspector, avoiding her question. "Have you lost any money? Or, if you are not certain on the point, I should feel obliged if you would ascertain."

"There is no occasion for me to leave the room to answer that question," said Martha. "I have lost no money whatever. But, again, why do you ask?"

"Well, ma'am, the fact is, that at Woolnot, about thirty miles from here, a man had been arrested on the charge of brutally ill-treating his wife. When he was examined before the magistrates one of my men happened to be present, and as he thought I might possibly want him for another case I had in hand, he sent to tell me about it. The man, it seems, had been drinking for several days, till at last he had wrought himself up to a state of drunken madness, and then attempted to murder his wife. The woman, however, wouldn't appear against him, and, as there was not sufficient evidence to convict him without, the magistrate could only fine him for drunkenness, and he was discharged. On making inquiries on the subject, my man found that he had not only been drinking himself, but treating others, although he had not been at work for some days past; and these

navvies are not as a rule a very provident class of men. Well, my man made further inquiries about him, and found that the day after his arrival in the place the fellow had offered a ten-pound note for change in a public-house. The publican, it seems, made some difficulty about it at first, and pretended he hadn't got so much money in the house, but gave him credit for a day or two. The note, however, seeming a good one, he afterwards changed it for him, and the whole of the money was spent by the man in the course of a few days. Before giving change for the note, the publican showed it to my man, who saw on the back of it the name of the bankers at X——, and he then sent to inform me of the circumstance, giving me at the time, for he is a sharp fellow enough, the number of the note. This morning, ma'am," continued the Inspector, "I made inquiry at the bank, and asked if they knew to whom it had been paid, and on looking over their books, they ascertained that it had lately been paid to you."

"They have made a mistake," said Martha, "it was not paid to me. The last cheque I drew was for fifty pounds, and they paid it to me in one note."

"Yes, ma'am, they're aware of that; but this was the cheque you changed about three weeks ago."

"Stop one moment," said Martha, "I certainly did change a cheque then, and among the rest were three ten-pound notes. But are they certain the one in question was paid to me?"

"They say they're positive, ma'am."

The idea now crossed Martha's mind whether it might not be possible she had given the ten-pound note to Morecombe. She had changed one at Mr. Carter's when she had made some purchases of him, but which one she could not tell."

"I changed one note," she at last said, "at Mr. Carter's, the general shop by the turnpike gates; you had better inquire of him whether it was that one."

"I will do so, ma'am," said the Inspector. "But the others—do you know what you have done with them?"

"Well," said Martha, stammering and hesitating, in a manner which strongly excited the Inspector's attention, "I do."

"Might I ask if you have any of them in the house?" inquired the Inspector.

"No, I have not," replied Martha, her embarrassment increasing.

"Would you have any objection to give me some idea what you have done with them, that I may trace the affair further, for I assure you it is of some importance."

"I really don't see why I should be called upon to give an account of what I do with my money. I have not lost any, and that ought to be sufficient for you. Besides," she continued, "what possible communication can I have had with the man who changed the note?"

The Inspector hesitated for a moment before speaking, as if deliberating what course he would pursue, while Martha, who was colouring deeply, attempted to hide her agitation under an assumed appearance of anger.

"Candidly, ma'am," said the Inspector at length, "I cannot tell very well, beyond the fact that you, for some kind motive, no doubt, had visited at the man's cottage, while he, with his wife and child, was residing in the village. I dare say you remember the man I mean; he was remarkably tall and powerful, and had a wife and one child. He was obliged to leave the works here in consequence of disputes with his fellow-workmen."

In a moment the crimson flush on Martha's face vanished, and a deadly paleness supplied

its place. She now easily identified the man as Bill Smithers, and remembered also that not only had she seen him herself in company with Morecombe, but the woman at whose house he lodged had told her that he was his intimate acquaintance. Could by any chance the money have passed from Morecombe's hands into that of the navvy? for she now felt convinced the ten-pound note alluded to was among the money she had given to Morecombe.

As Martha remained silent, the Inspector, who had been watching her narrowly, said,

"You must see yourself, ma'am, how much depends on your evidence in the matter."

"In what matter?" said Martha. "You don't suppose that I gave the man who beat his wife a ten-pound note?"

"I don't suppose anything about it," said the Inspector. "All I want to ascertain is the fact how it came into his possession. He was an intimate friend of the man who attempted to stop your pony-chaise, a fellow of the name of Morton, I believe, whom we have lost sight of for some time past."

"How do you know he was his friend?" asked Martha, feeling she was obliged to say something, but hardly knew what.

"Oh! they were frequently seen together," said the Inspector. "The very night Mr. Thornbury was attacked, they were noticed by one of my patrols, between eight and nine o'clock, just as it was getting dark, conversing together under a tree; and when they saw him coming they moved away."

"He saw them together as late as nine o'clock in the evening?" said Martha, remembering Morecombe's assurance that he had left for London by the four o'clock train the same afternoon she gave him the money.

"Yes, ma'am," said the Inspector; "you must see yourself that to know how the man became possessed of the ten-pound note may lead to the discovery of the villains who attempted to murder your nephew."

"But can you not ascertain whether the man who stopped my pony-chaise did not leave X—— the same day? Very possibly your patrol may have mistaken him for some one else," said Martha.

The Inspector looked steadily at her for some time; and then with something less of respect than he usually showed in addressing her, said,

"I have not inquired, ma'am, but will certainly do so, though I have no reason to doubt

the statement of my man. Once more, may I ask if you can or will give me any intelligence as to what you have done with those notes? If you will, it may greatly assist the course of justice; but if you do not, it may retard it to a great extent."

"And once more," said Martha, "I cannot allow you to question me on my private affairs. At the same time," she continued, as if struck by a happy thought, "if you will distinctly prove to me that the man—you know whom I mean—the one who stopped my chaise, was here as late as you state, I will think further on the matter. If you send any letter to the housekeeper here, she will forward it to me, and if I think it advisable I will then give you every particular in my power. I must go now, as I hear the carriage coming to the door."

"Might I ask, ma'am, if you have any reason to believe that this Morton left X—— before the time stated? If you have, and will kindly inform me your reasons, it will greatly assist me."

Martha was now utterly incapable to form any rational answer, so as not to allow the Inspector to see she was aware that Morecombe had left X—— before the evening. At last, by way of breaking off all conversation on the matter, she said to him,

"I cannot remain with you any longer, sir, for I wish to reach X—— as soon as possible. But, as I said before, if you will write to me as soon as you have ascertained whether it is or is not the case, I will then tell you all I know. Good morning." She then hurried off, as if afraid the Inspector might further question her on what she knew of Morecombe.

After the carriage had driven off, the Inspector remained motionless, watching it from the window.

"There's something deeper in this matter than is generally imagined, and that old lady knows all about it," he said to himself. "However, cunning as she may think herself, I'll prove to my lady that I am as cunning as she is after all—and more so too." And then, leaving the house, he went round to the stable-yard to meet his man, who had returned that morning, and after a little conversation they started off together towards the village.

Martha had no sooner taken her seat in the carriage than Cooper, who was sitting opposite, said to her,

"Are you not well, ma'am?—you look so pale."

"No," said Martha, "I do not feel very well;

but it will go off presently. Don't take any notice of me."

"But I'd better go back, ma'am, for something," said Cooper; and she called out to the coachman to stop, thinking Martha was on the point of fainting.

"No, no," said Martha, impatiently and making an effort to recover herself; "drive on."

The coachman obeyed her, and the cool air, as she passed rapidly through it, somewhat revived her, and before long she had managed to regain some of her self-possession. Then throwing herself back in the carriage she remained silent and reserved till she had reached Mr. Keats's house, not even glancing at Mr. Carter, as she was accustomed to do in passing.

It wanted some hours before the departure of the train, which Martha passed in a state of painful anxiety, or rather mental torture, having to answer the sympathising questions of the family as to the state of her health, for her pallor still continued, and they noticed it. When their fears were somewhat allayed upon that point, they overwhelmed her with questions, as to what arrangements she had made at the Red House, what she intended doing in London, and other things about her journey. So painful at

length did these questions become, and so difficult did she find it to answer them, that pleading a headache, she said she would lie down for a little while in Fanny's room. Even when in solitude she found no relief; on the contrary, the cruel complications of the position she was in came before her with even greater vividness, and what conclusion to arrive at she knew not. She endeavoured to force her mind into the belief that Morecombe had quitted X—— by the train he stated, and yet the distinct assertion of the Inspector, that he had been seen at a late hour in the evening, again came before her. If this were true, there was too much reason to suspect that Morecombe and the navvy might after all have been implicated in the attack upon Walter, though there was still the fact that he had not been robbed, and many other improbabilities against such a suggestion.

Suddenly the idea occurred to her whether she could not herself inquire of the clerk at the railway station if a dispute had taken place between himself and Morecombe about changing the note. She accordingly dressed herself ready for the journey, and then joining the family downstairs, requested her nephew to accompany her to the station. Mr. Keats and the rest of

the family assured her that she had about half an hour still to spare before she need think of starting, and she then took her seat among them, and attempted to join in the conversation. Then the happy thought struck her that she had a small purchase to make in the town, and that would be an excuse for leaving sooner, and getting to the station before the others, as she knew some of the family would accompany Walter to see them off. She now hastily bade them adieu, saying she would meet them at the station, and positively declining the offer of one of the daughters to accompany her, left the house by herself.

Her purchase being completed, Martha next bent her steps towards the railway station, where she fortunately found the clerk standing near his desk, and no one with him. After she had received her tickets for the journey, with an assumed attempt at indifference, she asked the clerk whether he remembered, about a fortnight ago, a poor man offering a bank-note for payment of his fare to London, and that there was some difficulty about giving him change.

After a moment's consideration the clerk replied—

"I remember it perfectly well, ma'am. I

not only had not sufficient change by me at that moment, but his appearance was so disreputable that I half suspected he had not come honestly by the note. Possibly I expressed my opinion too openly, for he got very angry. However, in the end I gave him the change, and that is all I know about it."

"I suppose you do not keep the number of the notes you change here?" inquired Martha.

"Not in general," replied the clerk, "but in this case I did, so much was I struck by the man's appearance," and he opened the desk to find it.

"Oh! never mind looking for it," said Martha, hardly certain whether she had done right in asking the last question, "it is of no consequence."

Then quitting the ticket-office, Martha remained in the waiting-room till Mr. Keats and the others arrived. The train soon came up to the platform, and after a hasty leave-taking, Martha, Fanny, and Walter, accompanied by Cooper, the maid, took their seats, and started for London.

CHAPTER V.

THORNBURY AND HIS WIFE LEAVE ENGLAND.

THE intelligence Martha received from the clerk of the booking-office relative to Morecombe's having presented a ten-pound note for change the afternoon of the attempted murder had a most beneficial effect on her temper and spirits. True, it was inexplicable to her how one of the ten-pound notes she gave to Morecombe had found its way into the possession of Bill Smithers. Still, that had but little to do with the point which had caused her such terrible anxiety—whether the Inspector of Police had really proof that Morecombe had been seen in the neighbourhood of the "Brickmakers' Arms," in conversation with another man as late as nine o'clock in the evening. Her mind was now at rest on the point, as if the subject were ever mooted again, the evidence of the booking-office clerk would be conclusive. The taciturn and abstracted manner she had shown

at Mr. Keats's had completely vanished before taking her seat in the train, and she chatted with so much liveliness and good-humour during their journey, that Walter congratulated her on having lost the headache she had complained of previous to leaving X——.

Arrived in London, Martha and her nephew drove to the furnished house Mr. Thornbury had hired during his temporary residence in town, and were warmly and affectionately received by him and his wife. Short as had been the time which had elapsed since they last met, they noticed the great alteration for the better which had taken place in Walter's appearance. With the exception of a cicatrice, which was rapidly healing, he might have been considered in perfect health. As it was, he was sufficiently recovered to take the superintendence of the business during his uncle's absence.

In the evening Fanny Keats, whom Martha had left at Mrs. Keats's sister's house as they drove from the station, called with her aunt, who gave both Martha and her nephew a general invitation to visit them during their stay in town. "In fact," said Mrs. Cheyne, "I hope we shall meet daily, as we have much to talk about. I assure you, from all I have heard, it

will give me great pleasure to be on terms of intimacy with my future nephew and his family."

Martha of course reciprocated the compliment, the conversation became general, and the evening passed very agreeably to all parties. The next morning, after Walter had quitted them to attend to his duties at the house of business, Edgar Thornbury told his sister he had a secret to confide to her which she must promise to keep inviolably.

"My dear brother," said Martha, "I should think, after all the years you have known me, you might by this time have learned to place sufficient reliance on my discretion to be in no alarm on the subject."

"In all ordinary cases, my dear Martha, I admit you to be discretion itself; but this secret I am about to confide to you is not of an ordinary description, and is one likely to tempt even a taciturn woman to talk. Understand me, however, if I have your promise, I require no better security."

"My promise you have, then," said Martha, laughing. "And now, what is it you have to tell me, for you greatly pique my curiosity?"

"Well, then, as walls have ears, put on your bonnet and shawl, and take a walk or ride with

me, whichever you think fit, and I will then confide my secret to you. And do not keep me waiting, Martha, by making any elaborate additions to your toilette; for although we are going to make a call, or perhaps two, you will not meet anyone worth dressing for."

Martha left the room, and in a few minutes, fully equipped for walking, joined her brother, who was quietly reading the paper in the parlour.

"What, ready so soon!" said Edgar, as she entered the room. "Why, Martha, I really compliment you. I should have given you five minutes longer without grumbling. I wanted to finish the article I am reading, but as you have met my wishes so readily, it won't do for me to keep you waiting. We will start, then, at once, and we can talk as we go along."

Shortly after they had left the house, Edgar said to his sister,

"You know, Martha, that Marguerite and I start in about ten days' time. Indeed, we have already secured our berths on one of the Peninsular and Oriental boats, so that nothing now can detain us. I put off doing this as long as possible, in the hope that the villains who attempted Walter's murder might have been ar-

rested, as I should much like to have known who they were, and what instigated them to attempt such a crime, for it was evidently not with the hope of plunder. But as nothing seems likely to be heard of them, and as Gregory, my solicitor, tells me the prosecution can go on as well without my presence as with it, I have definitely resolved on starting, In fact, I had almost done so before leaving X——. But now to the subject I wished principally to speak to you upon. I should much like to have been present at the wedding between Walter and Fanny, which it has been agreed with Keats shall take place in about eight months, as I hope by that time to have finished my affairs in India, and returned to England. But it is very difficult to calculate upon the time business transactions will take in India, and very possibly I may be delayed much longer than I at present anticipate. Should this be the case, the wedding will take place without us. Now, both Marguerite and I wish each to make Fanny a present on her marriage. Marguerite's has already been purchased. It is a Cashmere shawl, and a really magnificent one too. I think I know what a good shawl of the kind is as well as most people, few have had more pass through their

hands in the way of business, and I can honestly say I never saw one much handsomer than that my wife intends presenting to Fanny. I have not yet determined what my present shall be, beyond that I intend it to be a handsome piece of jewelry. I now propose going to Storr and Mortimer's to buy it, and I want you to advise me in selecting it."

"But, dear Edgar, would not Marguerite be a better judge than I am? Besides——"

"I know what you would say," said her brother, "or rather what you mean. You think Marguerite may be offended at my not appealing to her taste instead of yours, But make yourself easy on that point. Marguerite herself proposed that I should consult you on the subject, as she is too much occupied with her outfit, and other matters to be arranged before she leaves England, to accompany me. So I hope all your scruples are now satisfied."

Martha made no further objection, and shortly afterwards she and her brother arrived at the jewellers', and were soon occupied in endeavouring to choose from the great variety of magnificent articles offered for their inspection a suitable present for the future bride. To accomplish this, however, was no easy matter, and they re-

mained so long undecided, that at length Edgar began to think they were unjustifiably occupying the time of the assistant attending on them. He requested Martha to choose from the different jewels spread before her six of those she admired the most, limiting the cost of each to two hundred guineas, and from these she was afterwards to select the one she liked best. This was done, and at last Martha's choice settled on a serpent bracelet, ornamented with diamonds. Mr. Thornbury then gave a cheque for the amount, and received the assistant's promise that the bracelet should be sent home that evening, carefully packed, so that no one should guess its contents.

The brother and sister now left the jewellers' shop, and proceeded homewards. As they were going Martha complimented her brother highly on his liberality.

"Not at all, Martha, my dear," he said. "God has given me abundance, and I must be niggardly indeed if I grudged a portion of it to make those whom I love happy. As, unfortunately, I have no children of my own, I cannot do better than bestow a portion of my wealth on those I have adopted, for I already look upon Fanny almost as my own child. I am sure when

I know her better I shall love her as such."

"Of that," said Martha, "I have no doubt, for a more amiable or loveable girl I do not know. But now don't be angry with me, Edgar, if I ask you a question. You have told me the presents you intend giving to Fanny, but you have said nothing about Walter—what present is he to have?"

"If I were likely to feel any anger against you, Martha, it would be for having taken the word out of my mouth, as old Deborah would have said, not for feeling interest in Walter. When you spoke I was on the point of telling you the present I intend making him, and I trust it will meet with your approbation. It is the furniture for his house."

"But he has no house," said Martha.

"Granted," said her brother, "but before he marries I suppose it will be necessary to provide himself with one. Now hear me out," he continued, interrupting Martha, who was about to speak, "I know perfectly well what you would say, that it will be necessary to provide the house before the furniture is bought. That is true enough. All I intend doing at present is to lodge a sufficient sum at my banker's for the purpose, to be drawn out by Walter as he

may require it. Of course before I go I shall inform Walter of my placing the money to his credit, and explain to him the manner I wish it to be applied. A difference may be made between the present I make Walter, and those Marguerite and I intend for Fanny. Hers must be kept secret, till, at any rate, the day before the wedding, if not the wedding-day itself; while Walter, who will have to prepare a house for the reception of his bride, may know of his immediately. I shall tell him, however, that I wish him to consult you on all the purchases he makes; not that I think for one moment he would employ the money otherwise than as I propose, but he might expend it somewhat extravagantly; and I know, Martha, with your habitual economy, you will make a sovereign go as far as most people will two. And now I think I have told you all, and I may erase the subject of the presents from my mind."

"But you have not said in what part of London you would wish Walter to reside," remarked Martha. "I think he would like to be guided by your opinion in that respect."

"I have no choice in the matter," replied her brother. "I have sufficient reliance in his prudence to be sure he will not outlive his means.

If he wants advice he can consult you, and I am sure, from the affection he has for you, he will pay every respect to your suggestions. But now, Martha, I must bid you good-bye till dinner time, and in the evening if Fanny joins us I will tell her and Walter the arrangements I have entered into respecting the furnishing of their house—of course not a word must be spoken about the bracelet and shawl."

In the afternoon, before Mr. Thornbury had returned from business, the bracelet arrived. Martha shewed it to her sister-in-law, who complimented her highly on the good taste she had shewn in the selection.

"Edgar told me," she continued, "the errand you and he were bound on, and that the purchase he made was to remain in your possession till our return from India; or in case we are delayed so long as to be unable to be present at the wedding, you were to present it to Fanny in his name. Now, I want you to do a similar favour for me. I suppose Edgar told you I intended giving Fanny a Cashmere shawl. I wish you would also take charge of that, and in case I am not in England, give it her for me at the same time you present her with the bracelet.

Come into my room, Martha, and I will show you the shawl."

Strong as had been Mr. Thornbury's praises of the beauty of the shawl, they did not surpass the reality. Although Martha, as a rule, was little addicted to the frivolities of dress, yet she was not wanting in good taste on the subject, and like most other women, a Cashmere shawl always found great favour in her eyes. In fact, it may be admitted that, after her brother had made her a present of one when he returned from India, Martha had contrasted the shawls she saw worn by other ladies with her own, and almost always to the advantage of the latter, and at last she became an *expert* in judging of their quality and value. Never in her life, however, had she seen one of greater beauty than that which her sister-in-law had purchased as a wedding-present for Fanny Keats. Martha was so struck with it, that she seemed almost disinclined, after minutely examining it, to fold it up. Even when she had done so, and taken it to her own room to place it in security with the bracelet, she could not help once more unfolding it, that she might have the pleasure of again feasting her eyes on its beauties.

Fanny Keats and her aunt were that day guests at Mrs. Thornbury's dinner-table. When their meal was over, and they had assembled in the drawing-room, Mr. Thornbury broached the subject of his presenting the lovers with the furniture of their house.

"I have placed the money to Walter's credit in Coutt's bank," he continued, "and he can draw it as he requires it. Remember I wish you to consult your own tastes in the purchases you make; at the same time if you want any advice, and it is probable you may, I am sure your aunt Martha, or Mrs. Keats, if she can leave X——,will give it you with pleasure. Of course I need not tell you, before purchasing the furniture it will be necessary for you to find a house."

"But where do you think we had better live, uncle?" inquired Walter.

"I leave that to your own and Fanny's discretion," said Mr. Thornbury, "only do not go too far from the office. I should advise your not taking too large a house at first, as you will entail both useless expense and extra trouble on yourselves. But, as I said before, I will leave you to decide on the locality you would

like to live in. There is plenty of time before you, so do not decide in a hurry."

Although both Walter and Fanny, after expressing their thanks to Mr. Thornbury for his liberality, promised they would take their time in selecting a house to reside in, they hardly kept their promise—certainly not as far as Fanny was concerned. The next morning at an early hour she called, with her aunt, on Martha, and insisted on her accompanying them to Kensington.

"To Kensington, Fanny!" said Martha—"what have you to do there?"

"Why, nothing particular, but it is such a fine morning, I thought a drive in Hyde Park would be very agreeable, and do us all good."

"Very likely," said Martha, "but you have not answered my question about Kensington. Do you wish to call on any one there?"

"Oh! no, only I thought we might drive round Kensington as well. I understand they are building there several streets of very handsome houses, and, just for curiosity's sake, we might go over some and see what they are like, and what they want for them."

"My dear," said Martha, who now fully comprehended Fanny's meaning, "I will go with

you if you like, but as my brother told you yesterday evening, you have plenty of time before you, and need not be in a hurry to decide on a house. Besides, I have not much time to spare this morning, as Mrs. Thornbury may wish me to assist or advise her in the preparations she is making for her voyage."

"Oh! I am sure she would be willing to do without you if I ask her as a favour," said Fanny, "she never refuses me anything. I will go to her at once." And without saying another word, she left the room to find Mrs. Thornbury. In a few minutes she returned.

"I have seen Mrs. Thornbury," she said, "and told her I wanted to take you for a drive with me in the park this fine morning, as I thought it would do you good, but that you feared she might wish to consult you on some subject, and therefore you would rather remain at home. She requested me to tell you she was very much obliged to you, but for the next two or three hours she should be engaged writing letters, and she hoped you would not think of keeping at home on her account, the more so as she fully agreed with me that the drive would do you good."

"Did you give her any reason beyond the

drive in Hyde Park, and your wish to benefit my health?" said Martha laughing.

"No, I did not," replied Fanny. "I saw she was busy writing, and I thought it better to disturb her as little as possible."

"Very considerate indeed!" said Martha. "And now, if you will ring the bell and order the carriage, I will get ready to accompany you."

The drive in Hyde Park was somewhat of the shortest, but they remained a long time in the interminable streets of handsome houses building in Kensington. Fanny insisted on her aunt and Martha going over several that were fully or nearly completed. Some they saw were considered admirably adapted for the residence of a newly-married couple in affluent circumstances, and although the terms were rather high for the amount of accommodation they afforded, they came well within the means of Walter and his intended bride. During their drive home Martha asked Fanny, if among the houses she had seen there was one she would like to reside in.

"There are several," replied Fanny, "that I much like. The only difficulty I should have would be in selecting one. However, I shall not trouble myself in thinking further on the sub-

ject at present, as I may see others I like better."

"I should have thought, Fanny," said her aunt, "you would hardly have occasion to seek further for a house to suit you. You must be difficult indeed to please, if one of those you have seen to-day is not good enough for you."

"I intend following Mr. Thornbury's advice," said Fanny laughing, "and shall not decide in a hurry, as we have plenty of time before us. To-morrow I shall get you to visit Bayswater with me, and the following day St. John's Wood. Then, when I return home, which it is understood I am to do the week after Mr. Thornbury has left England, I can think over the subject at my leisure."

"Does Walter know of your present house hunting?" inquired Martha.

"Does Walter know of it?" said Fanny, with something like indignation in her tone. "Of course he does. You do not think I should have taken a step of the kind but at his request.'"

"Might I ask when he made the request?" asked Martha. "I do not suppose you have seen him this morning, and I do not remember your having been absent together from the drawing-room during the whole evening. You

see, Fanny, old maids have keen powers of observation."

"That they have sharp eyes, I know," said Fanny; "but their ears are sometimes at fault, as, for example, yesterday evening. If your ears had been as sharp as your eyes ten minutes after Mr. Thornbury had done speaking, you would have heard Walter implore me—yes, I mean implore me—though in a whisper, not to lose a day, but to commence house-hunting at once. It is impossible for him to find time now, and after his uncle has left he will be even more occupied than he is at present. So you see, Miss Thornbury, I am acting under instructions in what I am doing, although you evidently did not give me credit for it."

Martha, seeing that Fanny was getting angry, thought it better to drop the conversation, nor was it again resumed that day. Although somewhat to her own inconvenience, Martha, to put Fanny into good humour, accompanied her to Bayswater, and the day following to St. John's Wood. Fanny, by way of fulfilling Walter's instructions to the fullest extent, proposed to visit other localities; but this Martha refused to sanction, saying that the time for her brother and his wife's departure was now so close at

hand, she did not like being absent from them more than she could help. As a compensation, she promised Fanny that, during the week she was to remain in London after Mr. Thornbury had left, she would accompany her to examine as many houses as she pleased, and then she would have ample food for consideration when she returned to X——.

Only two days had now to elapse before Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury started for India, when several letters arrived from X——. The family at the time were seated at breakfast. The greater number of letters were for Mr. Thornbury, one for his wife, and another for Martha. They did not wait to finish their meal before opening them, and were soon absorbed in their contents. Martha's letter, which contained an enclosure, was from Mrs. Watkins, the housekeeper at the Red House, who merely said she forwarded a note to Miss Thornbury, which had arrived the day before, and she had lost no time in sending it on by the next post, as she had been desired. Martha glanced for a moment on the letter enclosed, and then, somewhat hurriedly, and without opening it, placed it in her pocket. Walter, who had noticed this, said to her—

"Upon my word, aunt, I begin to suspect

you are in love. You are so very mysterious about your letters. Before leaving the Red House, you used to receive them, and hide them at once, without saying a word about their contents to anyone, and you are doing the same thing now. Come, aunt, open your letter, for I am dying to know who your mysterious correspondent may be."

As Walter spoke, Martha coloured deeply, and cast an anxious glance at her brother, who was fortunately too much absorbed in his own letters either to hear his nephew's remark, or notice his sister's confusion. Nor did Mrs. Thornbury, for she was equally occupied with her letter, which was a very kind one from Mrs. Keats, wishing her a prosperous journey, and expressing her strong hope that she would return to England before the wedding, as her absence would be much felt on the occasion; indeed, she feared, if Mr. Thornbury and herself were not present, it would throw a gloom over the whole proceeding.

Mr. Thornbury, while holding a letter still in his hand, here said to them—

"I have received a communication from Gregory this morning, in which he tells me that the police are still carrying on researches to

find out the villains who attacked you, Walter. In fact, the whole country is on the alert, in great part stimulated by the liberal reward which has been offered for the detection of the offenders. He tells me that, apart from his desire to find them, the case itself is becoming exceedingly interesting, inasmuch as they are beginning to form a tolerably close idea who the assassins were—indeed, they are almost certain on the point; and yet there is a connecting link wanting somewhere, which must be obtained to prove their identity."

"Does he state in the letter who the suspected persons are?" asked Walter.

"No, but doubtless they are the two men who were hanging about the 'Brickmakers' Arms' the night of the attack. I shall write to Gregory by to-night's post, requesting him to spare no expense in prosecuting the search. Apart from the two hundred pounds offered as a reward, I promised the Inspector of Police a gratuity of fifty pounds for himself should he succeed, and I shall tell Gregory to inform him that, in case of his success, I will double the amount. I have a letter also from Mr. Keats," he continued, "wishing me a prosperous journey and a quick return, and another from the farm

bailiff, who assures me that everything is going on in a satisfactory manner. So now, I think, apart from the prosecution of the villains who attempted the murder, I shall be able to leave England with my mind tolerably clear on all subjects. Keats tells me in his letter that he and his wife would have come up to London to see us off, but that she is somewhat indisposed, and he is detained in X—— by his clerical duties. To tell you candidly the truth, I am not at all sorry for their absence, as I hate many persons about me when starting on a journey. It's quite painful enough bidding adieu to those we love without increasing the feeling unnecessarily."

"When do you definitely intend starting?" inquired Martha.

The boat leaves Southampton the day after to-morrow, and as I wish Marguerite to have time to arrange her traps in the cabin prior to starting, we propose leaving here to-morrow morning. I wish, Martha," he continued, "you would invite Fanny and her aunt to dine with us to-day, so that I may take leave of her to-night. I shall want Walter to accompany us to Southampton, as very possibly there may be other instructions to give him, which in the con-

fusion and bustle of the last few day I may have forgotten. You, my dear sister, I shall take leave of to-morrow morning. Remember that during my absence I hold you answerable for everything that passes at the Red House. There you will be absolute mistress. Till the wedding takes place, I hope you will have Fanny with you as much as possible, otherwise you will find it terribly dull. It is almost a pity your habits have been so secluded, or you might have formed some intimates in the neighbourhood. Possibly it may not be too late to do so now. Walter, I hope, will see you very frequently. He can always come down by the Saturday evening's train, and return to business on Monday. Then again, remember I by no means confine your residence to the Red House; on the contrary, I expect that at any rate some few weeks before the wedding you will reside with Walter in London, to assist him in choosing his house, and furnishing it. Now, if there is any subject on which you would like further instructions from me, think of it during the day, for to-morrow it will be too late. Do not fail to write to us by every mail which leaves for Calcutta, for both Marguerite and myself will look forward to the receipt of your letters with great pleasure. And now,"

he continued, rising from his chair, "it is time, Walter, to go to the office, and I can there give you my last instructions. I intend leaving everything in your hands, and that with the fullest reliance in your sagacity and energy."

CHAPTER VI.

MARTHA RETURNS TO THE RED HOUSE.

IT need hardly be stated that the letter which caused Martha so much embarrassment when she recognized the handwriting on the envelope, was from Morecombe. Much as her mind was occupied as well as distressed at the idea of her brother's departure, she took an early opportunity to leave the breakfast-table and seek her room, where she could ascertain the contents of the letter. This caused her great dissatisfaction, for she found, not only that Morecombe was still in London, but that he clearly informed her that it would be impossible for him to leave England unless she advanced him a further sum of money.

"You can imagine, Martha," he said in his letter, "how helpless I should be when I arrived in America with no more money in hand than I shall then possess. Had I been younger, and with a greater amount of energy and activity,

it might have been otherwise. Then I could have made my way in the world without much difficulty; but at my time of life it is very different. Again, a great portion of the money you gave me has been already expended, for after my arrival in London I met more than one person to whom I had formerly owed money. True, from the length of time which had elapsed since they had befriended me, they could have no legal claim on me, but as I found them in reduced circumstances (and one even in great poverty), it would have been ungrateful on my part had I not returned to them a portion of my old debt. I think I told you I had taken my berth on board a ship bound to America, which was to start in a day or two; but I have contrived, through the kindness of the owners, to transfer my passage to another of their ships, which will leave the London Docks in about a fortnight. Now, Martha, I implore you to advance me another hundred pounds. Remember, I offer no threat of annoyance to you if you refuse, but it is almost an act of charity that I am asking of you."

Another portion of his letter related solely to the attack which had been made on Walter. He earnestly implored Martha to inform him

whether the police had succeeded in getting on the track of the villains, and whether they had any suspicion who they really were; also the amount of the reward which had been offered for their apprehension. In conclusion, he requested her when she wrote to address her letter, W. M., Post Office, —— Street, and that he would call for it.

Great as was her annoyance at Morecombe's letter, Martha's mind was so occupied by the sorrow she felt at the approaching departure of her brother, that she was unable to give it the consideration it deserved. The following day however, when her sorrowful leavetaking was over, and Mr. Thornbury, with his wife and Walter, had left her, she again read Morecombe's letter. Although it was worded with great civility, and certainly appeared to carry with it much plausibility, she could not divest herself, of the idea he was practising on her some deception. She had had too many proofs how little reliance was to be placed on his word, to accept for granted his statements in the present instance. After all, if she advanced him the money, which she could do without difficulty, it was more than probable it might merely act as a temptation to him to remain in England. If, on

the other hand, she gave him a peremptory refusal, might he not be driven to despair and attempt to annoy Walter, and thereby create an amount of scandal which it was her earnest wish to avoid? Since her conversation with the clerk at the booking-office of the station at X——, she no longer entertained the suspicion which she had formerly done, that Morecombe had been engaged in the murderous attack on Walter.

After giving the subject as much consideration as she was able to do that day, she at last resolved, if possible, to forward the hundred pounds he asked for, to some bankers in New York, who should pay it to him on his personal application. But to accomplish this was a financial operation far beyond Martha's powers, and she now set herself to work to invent some suppositious case, to place before Walter when he returned home, so that she might be fully persuaded of its practicability, and then she could write to Morecombe informing him of the steps she had taken.

The next day Walter returned to London. Martha overwhelmed him with questions respecting the ship, the comfort and size of the cabins, what sort of a man the captain was, and many other cognate subjects which would be totally

uninteresting to the reader, but all of which Walter answered to her complete satisfaction. She then placed before him the supposed case she had drawn up, which was to guide her in her behaviour to Morecombe. Walter, in reply, told her it was quite possible, and then asked if she was herself contemplating a transaction of the kind, as he should be most happy to be her agent in the matter.

"You know, aunt," he continued laughing, "I am fully convinced you are engaged in some terribly mysterious affair of love or murder, I don't know which; I strongly suspect, however, the former, the latter being hardly in your way. Now, who is it you want to send money to, for I can easily perceive, cleverly as you think you have put the question, you are one of the parties interested in the matter. You may as well be candid and tell me at once the whole truth, and the circumstances of the case, and I assure you that your little love affair (for I am persuaded something of that sort is mixed up in it) shall remain an inviolable secret in my hands."

Martha was greatly vexed at her nephew having seen through her plot so easily; and dreading least he should pursue his questions further, she abruptly changed the conversation.

"Do you not intend seeing Fanny this evening?" she said to him. "You must remember she has less than a week now to remain in London. She received a letter from her father yesterday, telling her he should take her back with him next Saturday, for he must be home by then as he has to preach in the Cathedral on Sunday.

"Certainly," replied Walter; "I shall call on her. But won't you accompany me, aunt?"

"Not this evening, dear. I do not feel very well," said Martha. "You can tell Fanny from me that, in case she would like a drive to-morrow, and will be here about noon, I shall be very happy to go with her, and can do the same every morning till she returns to X——."

"You don't return with her, then, aunt?" inquired Walter.

"No, dear," said Martha, in a somewhat hesitating manner, "I think I should like to stop in London a few days longer—perhaps even a week or so—and then I shall return to the Red House. I suppose you will not object to give me house-room for that time?"

"I will do so willingly, aunt," said Walter, "and the more so did I think that it was not for the purpose of carrying on at leisure your

own mysterious business transaction, but from love of me that you remained in London."

"Walter," said Martha, looking at him reproachfully, "you have no right to doubt my love for you."

"Indeed I have not," said her nephew, kissing her affectionately. "A better soul than you are never lived. Now, my dear aunt, don't look serious upon the subject, for I was only joking. But I must be going, so good-bye for the present. As I suppose it will be late when I return, I will tell you to-morrow at breakfast what Fanny says about driving out with you."

No sooner had Walter quitted the house than Martha commenced a letter to Morecombe. In it she told him that her delay in answering arose from her having been in London for some days, but she intended returning to the Red House, where he was to send his reply. Her letter was short and explicit in the extreme. She merely told him she was greatly chagrined to find he had not kept his promise to leave England. At the same time she was ready to admit there was considerable reason in some of his arguments. It was her intention, as soon as she could arrange matters satisfactorily, to forward to his credit to some bankers in New York the hundred pounds

he requested, which would only be paid to him personally. That he was to write to her to say whether this met his views, as in case it did not she should decline assisting him in any other way. With respect to the proceedings which were being taken against the villains who attempted to murder his son, the police were still actively employed in them; and, although she knew but little of the amount of success attending their efforts, beyond the fact that they seemed fully persuaded they were on the right track, they had no doubt the men would soon be in custody. She merely signed her letter in initials, and purposely omitted giving him her address in London.

The next morning Fanny Keats called on Martha for the purpose of visiting other houses in London, so as to have a long list of those eligible to consider over at her leisure after her return to X——. The following day was also occupied in a similar manner, and the next as well; but no house seemed so suitable as one she had seen in Kensington. Fanny now inspected it again, and the more she saw of it the better it pleased her; and she told Walter he must take a holiday the following Friday, the last day of her sojourn in town, and go with her to see it.

Should it please him as much as it did her, they could give orders for its completion, as it would require some three or four months to finish its ornamentation and papering before it would be fit for habitation. Walter told her it was impossible he could be absent from business the whole day, but he would arrange so as not to be at the office before noon, and if they started early in the morning they would have ample time to inspect the house at Kensington. He further promised that he would leave business immediately after 'Change in the afternoon, so that he need be absent from her but a few hours in the course of the day. Fanny having agreed to this arrangement, the carriage was ordered to be ready to conduct them to Kensington by ten o'clock the next morning.

Although Martha had consented to accompany them the next morning, she felt but little spirit for the task, and would willingly have remained at home, but that Walter begged of her not to do so. The cause of Martha's disinclination to leave home arose from a letter which had that morning been forwarded to her from the Red House, and which was fortunately placed in her hands without her nephew's knowledge. It was another epistle from More-

combe, but this time worded in a very different manner from the last. In it he insisted, in an abrupt way, that the hundred pounds should be paid to him before he left England, or he should decline keeping the promise he had made. He accused her of offering him a gross affront in the manner she had proposed sending the money to New York to await his arrival. She was totally unjustified, he said, in making a proposition of the kind, which he certainly should resent. He was perfectly willing to treat her with every respect and courtesy as long as she could address him with civility; but in case she forgot the respect due to him, he should certainly prove to her that he still held the power in his hand of which he had formerly spoken to her, and which he should put in force in case he did not find her amenable to reason. He concluded by saying he should expect from her a far more courteous and satisfactory reply than the one she had last sent him, as otherwise he should without fail pay her another visit at the Red House, which most probably would end in a less agreeable manner than the former.

It need hardly be said that Martha was exceedingly abstracted during their drive. For-

tunately for her, the young people chatted together incessantly, and were so absorbed in each other, that she did not attract their attention. Arrived in Kensington, they minutely examined the house, and Walter was as much pleased with it as Fanny had been. On quitting it, they went to the office of the builder, and after a few minutes conversation Walter agreed to take it, subject, however, to the approval of his solicitor. In driving towards home, Walter expressed his wish to visit the warehouse of some first-rate upholsterer, so that they might form an idea of the fashion and quality of the furniture they might require. In vain did Martha, who was most anxious to return home, appeal against the delay, or remind her nephew that he had promised to be at his office by noon, and there was then but little time to spare. Her companions were inexorable, and she was obliged to yield. More than two hours were consumed in visits to Gillows' and other fashionable cabinet-makers, till at last Walter himself was obliged to admit that he had exceeded his time, and must return home. On their way they left Fanny at her aunt's house, and shortly afterwards, to economise time, Walter hailed a hansom cab, and quitting his aunt, drove to the

City, leaving her and Fanny to return home alone.

On arriving at the house, Martha was greatly surprised to hear that there were three gentlemen waiting for her in the drawing-room. She inquired who they were, and the servant informed her that one was the father of Miss Keats, but the others he did not know. He further added that they seemed most anxious to see her, and had been waiting for nearly two hours. Martha now hurried upstairs, and in the drawing-room found Mr. Keats, Mr. Gregory, and the Inspector of Police. Martha advanced with her usual friendliness of manner to Mr. Keats, who certainly took her proffered hand, but, at the same time, there was an appearance of coldness and formality about him totally different from his usual habit, which puzzled her exceedingly. After they were seated, Mr. Gregory, the solicitor, commenced the conversation.

"The Inspector of Police informs me, Miss Thornbury, that, on the morning you left the Red House for London, he had the honour of an interview with you respecting the men whom he considered implicated in the murderous attack on your nephew. He particularly wished to know in what manner a bank-note

came into the possession of one of them. You refused to give him any information, urging that he had no right to inquire into your private affairs. But at last you told him, if it could be proved that a somewhat elderly man, who was suspected of being one of the accomplices, had been seen about eight o'clock in the evening near the 'Brickmakers' Arms,' in conversation with a notoriously bad character, you would then give him all the information in your power. Is that the case?"

"It is," said Martha, becoming pale and greatly agitated.

"Well then, ma'am," said the Inspector, "I am able distinctly to prove by two or three witnesses that he was hanging about the neighbourhood at the time stated. Nay more, that the elderly man I alluded to, applied for a ticket to go to London by the four o'clock train, and offered a ten-pound note to the booking clerk, who for some time refused to change it, suspecting, from the very disreputable appearance the fellow presented, that he had come dishonestly by it. At last he gave the change, but, by way of precaution, took the number of the note. This note we have also traced, and find it was paid by the bankers to you in ex-

change for a cheque, at the same time as the other ten-pound note which was found in the possession of the navvy. We can also prove that the elderly man did not go up to town by the train at four o'clock. In the first place, not only was his ticket found torn up beside a wall near the railway station, but, as I said before, I have also several witnesses of unimpeachable veracity who can prove he was hanging about the neighbourhood of the Red House during the whole of the evening. And now, ma'am," he continued, "might I ask you to fulfil your promise, and tell me what you know of the fellow."

Martha, now deadly pale, remained silent. The Inspector again put the question to her, but as she still made no reply, he added,

"I may as well tell you, ma'am, that I am also in possession of the fact that the same man, dressed as a gentleman, and so well got up that my detective, had he not been a very clever fellow, would have failed to recognize him as the same, called on you at the Red House before you left for London; and that afterwards you met him in a lane leading from the house to the railway-works, where he had a somewhat lengthened conversation with you. I have also other proofs in my possession, which it is useless

to speak of at present. I merely mention these to you to shew how unfavourably your name seems likely to be mixed up in the affair, and the only way of avoiding it is by telling us candidly all you know about it. It is customary, as you know,sir," he continued, turning to Mr. Gregory, "not to press any person to make a communication likely to compromise himself, but of course, with regard to this lady, that is not likely to be the case."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Gregory. "Of course not; and I am fully convinced that when Miss Thornbury thinks coolly over the matter she will give us all the information in her power."

The expression of alarm which was visible on Martha's countenance when the Inspector proved to her so clearly that Morecombe had not left X—— by the four o'clock train, now changed to one of strong indignation, when she heard the evidently intended inuendo of the Inspector, that she might be criminally implicated in the affair. Eager to clear herself, she was upon the point of explaining all that had taken place between Morecombe and herself, when the idea flashed across her mind that, by so doing, in all probability her beloved nephew would be obliged to bear witness against his own father. Strong

as was her wish to exculpate herself from so odious an accusation, she was so completely overwhelmed with horror at the idea of such a contingency, that she remained as silent as before. Again Mr. Gregory pressed the question, and Martha, now fairly at bay, could no longer remain silent.

"And how dare you, sir," she said, the tears running down her face, "hint at such an idea; for I perfectly understand you to mean that I might have been mixed up in the would-be murder of my own nephew! You, Mr. Keats," she continued, turning to him, "who know perfectly well my family affairs, can bear witness whether it would be possible for a mother to have tended her son—ay, and from his earliest childhood, with greater care and affection than I have my nephew Walter; and yet you sit by and quietly hear the horrible inuendo brought against me. Thank God, the whole tenor of my behaviour to him will prove its falsehood."

"Miss Thornbury," said Mr. Keats, slowly and emphatically, "I am perfectly ready to admit that the idea of your being mixed up even in the most remote manner with any one who you knew would be concocting an injury to your nephew, would be utterly absurd. No one

can bear more honourable testimony to your behaviour to him than I can; but you must remember that the attack was not intended for him, but for your brother. I am also pained to be obliged to state—that is, if I have understood the Inspector of Police correctly—that it is gravely suspected you were the person who informed the grey-haired man that your brother was expected to arrive at the Red House late at night. Even you were not aware that your nephew would arrive in his place. It is therefore perfectly clear the attack was intended for your brother, and not for your nephew, and the proof, therefore, which you offer of your love for the latter, rendering it impossible you could have been mixed up with those intending to do him an injury, does not bear in the present case. We are all perfectly ready to admit we have no proof that a quarrel even took place between you and your brother; but at the same time—and this I speak quite candidly—we wish to erase from our minds a suspicion which haunts the whole of us, that directly or indirectly you have been mixed up with the persons who intended his murder. Nay, do not look so indignant, for remember you have only yourself to blame for it. A few words from you might place the miscreants

in the hands of justice; and those, for some reasons of your own, you refuse to speak. Now, once more, let me implore you to be candid with us, for I assure you the suspicions against you are scarcely more painful to you than to ourselves."

"Gentlemen," said Martha, after a few moments' silence, "I have nothing to tell you, nor any explanation to make."

"And that we are to accept as your ultimate reply?"

"Certainly," said Martha.

"Then, Miss Thornbury," continued Mr. Keats, "painful as it is to me, I must request you for the future to consider that myself and all my family are total strangers to you, even to the extent of omitting the ordinary salutations when passing each other in the streets."

"And let me say a word more," said the Inspector, who appeared greatly annoyed at the ill-success of their visit, "I have reason to believe that you have been in communication with one of the men since you have been in London. We are upon his track here, and be assured of this, that in case we find him, there is little doubt you will have to take your place beside him in the dock. Act as you please on the sub-

ject, but I will communicate no longer with you as a witness."

Mr. Keats, Mr. Gregory, and the Inspector of Police now quitted the house, leaving Martha in a state of absolute terror. What step to take she knew not. Willingly would she have told the whole truth, but the idea of bringing her dear sister's child, who was loved by her as tenderly as if he had been her own son, into the witness-box against his own father, compelled her to maintain a strict silence. And then again what view would Walter take of the matter when he was informed Mr. Keats declined any further acquaintance with her, and that, too, on account of the suspicion of her being mixed up in the contemplated attack on her brother. Should Walter see the affair in the same light, what would be the result? To be spurned by him would break her heart, bound to him as she was by the double tie of affection, and the promise she had made her poor sister on her death-bed, to watch over him as if he were her own son.

Martha continued in this train of thought for some time, till she remembered the letter she had that morning received from Morecombe, and the threat it contained,—that in case he did not

receive the hundred pounds from her, in the course of a few days he would again visit her at the Red House. If he did this, now that he was known to the police at X—— as the same individual who had appeared in such a shabby condition prior to the attempted murder, he would certainly be arrested, and the whole of the affair and its complications would be known to the world.

Great as was Martha's sorrow, she could not disguise from herself that the necessities of the position she was in called for immediate and energetic action. In the first place, what was to be done about Walter? True, she had time for reflection, as she should not see him till the next morning, he being engaged to dine and spend the evening with Fanny Keats and her aunt. She knew, however, that there he would meet Mr. Keats, when the subject of his interview with her in the morning would be duly talked over. Although she could easily find an excuse for not meeting Walter that evening, what explanation could she offer him the next day, when, it was but too clear, he would speak to her on the subject? She could not tell him the truth, as she dreaded the effect it would have on him when he heard that his own fa-

ther was the villain who had proposed the murder. To refuse to give him an explanation would be to confirm the strong suspicion existing against her, which he would certainly have heard from Mr. Keats.

Then her mind reverted to Morecombe, and what steps she should take with him. Drawing his letter from her pocket, she read it carefully over. The threat he made in it, that he would visit her at the Red House again, arrested her attention, causing her even more alarm than before. If he attempted it he would infallibly be discovered by the police, who, stimulated by the reward, were now actively on the alert. She perceived the necessity of getting Morecombe out of the kingdom as quickly as possible, and that the only means by which it could be accomplished would be by advancing him the hundred pounds he had demanded of her. To do this, however, would be impossible, unless she returned to the Red House, as she saw it would be dangerous to draw a cheque in his favour, and that the better plan would be to send the money in bank-notes. Once at X——, she could change the cheque herself, and forward the money, as she had don before, by a registered letter.

While reflecting deeply over the subject, the idea crossed her mind whether it would not be the better plan for her to leave London that evening by the mail train, and by doing so she would also be able to avoid seeing Walter, and giving him a personal explanation of her conduct, as he would not have returned from the Keats's till after she had left town. After mature consideration, she resolved on the plan, determining to write a short letter both to Walter and Morecombe, explaining the reasons for her so suddenly quitting London. In her letter to Morecombe, she told him that she would endeavour to meet his views, if he would address a line by the next post to the Red House, telling her where she could forward the money. She requested that he would understand that, in doing so, she by no means yielded to the threats contained in his letter, but that, owing to circumstances which had lately occurred, it was rendered imperative for him to quit England with as little delay as possible. She told him of the visit she had that morning received from the Inspector of Police and Mr. Gregory, her brother's solicitor at X——,though omitting any mention of her conversation with Mr. Keats. She informed him what they had said

about being able to prove distinctly that he (Morecombe) had not left X—— by the four o'clock train the same day that Walter was attacked; that he had merely changed the note and taken the ticket to put the police off their guard, and that the ticket had been found destroyed near a wall a short distance from the station; moreover, that he had been identified by several witnesses as having been seen lurking near the "Brickmakers' Arms" in company with one of the men employed on the railway works, and who, they state, was his accomplice in the attack on Walter; also, that the detective who was at the Red House at the time of his last visit to X——, had recognised him, in spite of his altered apparel, as the same individual, and that the police had followed him to London, where they lost sight of him; but they were still upon his track, and a warrant had been issued for his apprehension. She merely mentioned these facts to him, she continued, to warn him of the danger he was in, and that, after due consideration, she had determined once more to give him the opportunity of leaving England; but she requested him to remember, in case he were arrested, she should throw aside all reserve, and appear in court as one of the witnesses against him.

Her letter to Walter, short as it was, caused her much thought and many tears. In it she said that she knew full well Mr. Keats would tell him of the interview he had had with her in the morning, and she could easily understand the sorrow and embarrassment such a communication would give him. She frankly acknowledged that, from circumstances she was unable to explain, it was not possible for her to clear up the mystery which appeared to shroud her conduct. The time might perhaps come when she would be able to do so, but she could not at present. She hoped, she continued, that he would not take an uncharitable view of her conduct, but out of the love she felt sure he bore her, he would not altogether deny the possibility that her silence was imposed upon her by circumstances over which she had no control. Let, however, his opinion be what it might, he would always be as dear to her as ever. To avoid any painful explanation with him, she had determined to leave London for X—— by the mail train, and intended to reside for some time at the Red House. In conclusion, she said she thought it better for him not to write to her asking for further explanation, as he would no doubt be tempted to do, for it would grieve her greatly

to refuse him, and it would be impossible to grant his request.

Having despatched Morecombe's letter to the post-office, and placed the one for Walter on the chimney-piece in the dining-room, Martha gave orders to the footman to call her nephew's attention to it when he returned home. She then summoned her maid Cooper, and told her to make preparations for the journey to X—— that evening. These were soon completed, and when the time arrived for starting, Martha, attended by her maid, left the house and proceeded to the railway station. On reaching X—— she found it would be too late for her to go to the Red House that night, so she secured a bed at the "Railway Inn," determining on the morrow, before proceeding homewards, to draw the cheque for the money she intended to send Morecombe, so that she might forward it without delay on the receipt of his letter informing her to what address it should be sent.

CHAPTER VII.

MARTHA'S PERSECUTIONS COMMENCE.

NOTWITHSTANDING her fatigue from the journey, and the over-strain on her mental faculties the previous day, Martha slept but little that night. The next morning, after she had breakfasted, she quitted the inn and proceeded to the bank, there to obtain the hundred pounds for Morecombe. On her way thither she passed a policeman on his beat, who looked at her so attentively, that, occupied as her mind was at the time on other subjects, she could not fail remarking it. Still, it made no particular impression on her, and she continued onwards till she had reached the bank. On entering, she mechanically turned her head, and found, to her great surprise, at some little distance, the policeman she had lately passed, evidently watching her movements. Though surprised at the man's behaviour, she took no further notice of it, but entered the bank, and proceeding to the counter,

requested the cashier who generally attended to her business to give her a blank cheque, as she wished to draw some money. The cashier instead of greeting her as an old acquaintance (for Martha, in her visits to the bank, frequently had a few minutes' conversation with him), looked at her attentively for a moment, and then, without saying a word, presented her with a blank cheque, and a pen for her to write with. Martha was rather puzzled at his behaviour, but drew the cheque for a hundred pounds in her own name, and then presented it to be cashed.

"How would you like the money, ma'am?" asked the cashier.

"I will take a hundred-pound note, if you please," replied Martha.

The cashier immediately procured the note, and then, beckoning to one of the clerks who was near him, called his attention, though in a whisper, to the number of the note as he entered it in the book. The note was then given to Martha, who placed it in her porte-monnaie, making some casual remark as she did so to the cashier, who merely bowed, without returning any answer, though regarding her attentively the while. As she was leaving the office the idea struck her that all the other clerks, with

looks of surprise or curiosity on their countenances, were watching her attentively. On getting into the road, she again saw the policeman who had followed her, but who was now standing at the corner of a street a little distance off, though sufficiently near to command a view of the entrance-door of the bank. Although at the moment he appeared to be in conversation with a person he had met, Martha could not divest herself of the idea that he was still watching her. She continued her way to the inn, and as she was upon the point of entering, she noticed that the same policeman had followed her, evidently with the intention of seeing her movements.

Martha had hardly entered the sitting-room, when, for the first time, she began to have some idea that the behaviour of the clerks in the bank, as well as that of the policeman, might have been caused from their having heard of the suspicions which hung over her. She now began to feel exceedingly annoyed, and the desire came over her to return as quickly as possible to the Red House, so as to avoid any other treatment of the same description. Having paid her bill and ordered a chaise, she entered it with Cooper, who noticed the appearance of vexation on the

countenance of her mistress, but was unable to account for it. When she neared the turnpike-gate, the toll-keeper, who had evidently recognized her at some little distance, rushed rapidly across the road and whispered something to Mr. Carter, who was then in his shop, and afterwards flew back to his post at the gate. Mr. Carter, in his turn, had called his wife to the shop-door, who, with her husband, as well as the toll-man, regarded Martha with great, though by no means friendly, curiosity. Annoyed by the intensity of their gaze, she wished the coachman to drive on; but the toll-man, evidently with the desire of indulging Mr. and Mrs. Carter with a full view of Martha, was a considerable time before he could find change for the half-crown which had been given him for the toll, and even when he found it he was obliged to enter the toll-house to get a ticket. At last the chaise drove on, and Martha, assuming an expression of pleasure she was far from feeling, nodded kindly to Mr. and Mrs. Carter as she passed their door, who returned her salutation with marked coldness.

Martha began to feel acutely the painful position in which she was placed. She could not disguise from herself that all whom she met re-

garded her with suspicion, if not aversion, evidently under the impression that she had been either directly or indirectly mixed up with the atrocious attempt which had been made upon her nephew's life. She endeavoured for a moment to dispel the thought by the reflection that it was hardly possible the unjust suspicions which had been aroused against her by the Inspector of Police and Mr. Gregory could have already become so extensively known as for such people as the bank clerks, the turnpike man, and Mr. Carter to be aware of them. This reflection gave her some relief, but on arriving at the lodge gates the conviction again came over her, caused by the behaviour of the woman who opened them, who, although she curtsied to Martha as she passed through, had an evident coldness in her manner, and a look of curiosity on her countenance, very different from the marked respect she had been accustomed to show her. On arriving at the house the same cool bearing was noticeable among the domestics who received her. Mrs. Watkins, the housekeeper, even went further. To Martha's request that she would see that the luggage was taken to her room, she did not even condescend to answer, but merely

whispered her order to one of the men, and then, without taking further notice of Martha, quitted her.

These manifold signs of curiosity and aversion told heavily on Martha's mind. Still she was upheld by the consciousness that they were undeserved, and she was only doing her duty. She remained at home the greater portion of the afternoon, without speaking to anyone, for all seemed to avoid her. At length the feeling of solitude became oppressive, and a feverish sensation came over her. She now resolved to stroll round the grounds, in hopes the cool air of the evening might refresh her heated brow, which began to throb in a painful manner. As night approached, a few drops of rain fell, which gave her a hint that it was time to return to the house. Before reaching it, however, another source of annoyance presented itself to her. To get to the house as quickly as possible, she took a by-path, and when passing a clump of trees noticed the butler in earnest conversation with a man who at first sight appeared a stranger, but whom on regarding him more attentively, she discovered to be no other than the detective who had been for so long on duty on the premises. The sight of this man gave Martha considerable annoyance,

and on entering the house she rang the bell, and when the footman answered it she requested him to send the butler to her without delay, as she wished to speak to him particularly. Shortly afterwards the butler entered the room, and then remained motionless, waiting for Martha to address him.

"A moment since," she said to him, "I saw you in conversation with a man in the garden. Was he not the detective who was here on duty after the attack made on my nephew?"

The butler making no answer to her remark, Martha continued, "Did you not hear my question?"

"Well, ma'am, I did," he now replied, "but I hardly know whether I am called upon to answer it."

"On that point," said Martha, "you do as you please; but, at the same time, I will not have anybody in this house who disputes my orders. You will either answer my question at once, or to-morrow I will pay you a month's wages in advance, and you leave."

The man seemed somewhat surprised at Martha's determination of manner, so different from that she habitually used when speaking to the servants. Suddenly recovering himself, he said

to her, "I shall take no order from you, ma'am, whatever. You're not my mistress, and I was not engaged by you."

"You are in error," said Martha. "My brother, when he left England, placed everything in my hands. As to-morrow will be Sunday I can do nothing, but on Monday I shall apply to a magistrate for protection, as I will not be insulted either by you or by any servant in the house."

The butler, who seemed greatly surprised at Martha's determination of manner, now left the room, muttering to himself that he did not mean to be disrespectful to her or anybody else, but that he didn't know what his duty was in the matter.

Martha paid no attention to his remark, but, when he had left the room, rang the bell for the housekeeper, who shortly afterwards made her appearance. When she entered there was evidently more respect on her countenance than she had exhibited when Martha returned to the house—possibly occasioned by a few moments' conversation she had had with the butler.

"On coming into the house a few minutes since," said Martha, "I thought I saw the butler in conversation with the detective police officer

who was employed about the premises before I left for London; is that man here still?"

The housekeeper hesitated for a moment, evidently wishing to avoid a direct answer; but Martha, whose mental energies were now thoroughly aroused, regarded her with so stern an expression of countenance, that the woman evidently saw it would be difficult to escape replying. After a moment's silence, she determined her answer should be half truth half falsehood.

"I don't know at all, ma'am," she replied. "He left the house a few days after your departure for London, and I've not seen him since. If he has returned it must have been this afternoon, for I was in the stable-yard this morning and saw no signs of him then."

"Just make the inquiry for me," said Martha, "and let me know as quickly as you can."

The housekeeper left the room, and a few minutes afterwards returned saying that she had been to the stables, and made inquiries of the men whether the detective had returned, but they assured her they had seen nothing of him. Martha looked at Mrs. Watkins intently for a moment, to discover whether she was telling the truth. Finding she did not flinch under her gaze,

she was convinced the statement was correct. Then changing the conversation, she said to the housekeeper,

"I have just had occasion to dismiss the butler, in consequence of his refusing to obey me. I think it better to tell you, Mrs. Watkins, so that you may inform the other servants that my brother, on leaving England, placed this establishment completely under my control; and although I wish that every person in it may be made as comfortable as possible, I will allow no one to dispute my authority. In case you should hear of that man—I mean the detective police officer —being seen about the premises, I wish you would inform me, as in that case I shall appeal to the magistrates for protection."

Mrs. Watkins left the room, evidently puzzled at Martha's cool determined manner, although it went sorely against her to succumb without any show of opposition. She was, however, a prudent woman; and after a moment's reflection, determined to submit quietly to Martha's orders for a few days longer, to see what course affairs would take, and then to shape her policy accordingly.

Lights were now brought in, and Martha remained in solitude in the dining-room, deeply

absorbed in meditation. Cooper, her maid, at last entered the room and asked her mistress if she required anything more that night, as she was suffering from a severe headache, and wished to go to bed. Aroused by the girl's entrance, Martha looked at the clock on the chimney-piece, and finding it was nearly eleven o'clock, she told Cooper to fetch her Bible, and then she and the rest of the servants might retire to bed. Cooper returned in a few moments, bringing with her a Bible, the same Deborah was accustomed to read from, during the long evenings when she and Martha were left together in the Red House.

Martha now dismissed her maid, and shortly afterwards the whole establishment was wrapt in profound silence. For some time she remained reflecting over the unjust suspicion which was then weighing on her, and the sorrow she should experience if her nephew Walter took the same view of her behaviour as Mr. Keats and his family had done. She continued in this train of thought for some time, till the sound of the stable clock striking midnight aroused her from her meditations. She now determined to pray to the Almighty for aid and comfort in her deep trouble; and her prayer,

which was long and earnest, appeared to afford her considerable consolation. Rising from her knees, she resumed her seat, and placing theBible beneath the lamp, opened it at hazard at the twenty-second Psalm. She read on steadily till she arrived at the twenty-fourth verse, when suddenly she remembered it was that verse the phantom of Deborah had pointed out to her when one night, in a starving condition, Martha had entered the dining-room some years before. So vividly did the whole circumstance come before her, that at last she fancied she saw the old servant's finger pointing out to her the particular verses applicable to her situation.

"For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him He heard."

"My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation; I will pay my vows before them that fear Him."

"The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek Him; your heart shall live for ever."

So completely had Martha at that moment identified herself with the scenes which had formerly passed in that room, that she fancied

she saw the withered finger of Deborah pointing to each successive line as she read, till it reached the last verse, when it vanished. Martha now leant back in her chair, her mind dwelling on the scenes which had taken place in other times. The remembrance of her father and mother—the former with an expression of helpless senility on his face—seated on each side of the fire-place, became so distinct on her memory, that at last she fancied they were present. She turned her head towards the fire-place, but the phantoms of her parents were not to be seen. With a feeling almost of disappointment, she again leant back in her chair, and her mind reverted to the terrible suspicion which was hanging over her. She felt that the certainty she was doing her duty would uphold her against the scorn and reprobation even of her brother and the Keats family; but when she came to think that their opinions might also influence her beloved nephew Walter, she was unable to keep her feelings longer under control, and burst into a violent flood of tears. Her sorrow continued unabated for a considerable time, but at length it gradually ceased under the gratifying idea that the approbation of her dear sister Charity was on her during her

persecution. The consolation this gave her raised her courage to such a point that she resolved, with even greater determination than before, to follow the course she had adopted, and to submit with patience to any contumely that might be heaped upon her, or persecution that might befall her.

No sooner had the resolution definitely crossed her mind than the sensation came over her that her sister Charity was, at that moment, standing by her side. Martha's first impulse was to turn and gaze upon her, but possibly the remembrance that a few moments before, when she fancied the phantoms of her father and mother were seated on each side of the fire-place, she had dispelled the illusion by turning her eyes towards them, kept her motionless. Instead, therefore, of moving her head towards her sister, she contented herself with the knowledge that she was standing by her, lest she might again dispel the sweet illusion she was under. Hour after hour passed, and Martha still remained in the happy conviction that her sister's spirit was near her. At length the first beams of dawn became apparent, and as these became brighter, the illusion seemed fainter and fainter, till she fairly awoke to the

realities of life. Martha now rose from her chair and stealthily seeking her own chamber, threw herself, dressed as she was, on the bed, and soon fell into a deep slumber.

It was late in the day before Martha awoke. Finding that she was still dressed, and not wishing her maid Cooper to see her, she performed her toilette somewhat hurriedly without assistance, and then descended to the breakfast-room. On entering, she saw the letter-bag on the table. It contained two letters for her—one from her nephew Walter, and the other from Morecombe. Martha first opened the one from Walter, and the next moment was deeply absorbed in its contents. His letter was written in a very affectionate tone. In it he told his aunt he had heard the details of the interview which had taken place between Mr. Keats and herself the previous day, and his great regret at the manner it had terminated. He said that suspicious as the circumstances connected with her appeared, he could not bring his mind to believe that she could act in so unworthy a manner. At the same time, he earnestly begged of her, from the love he was aware she bore him, to tell candidly all she knew on the subject, as he was fully convinced she had taken no part in it

that, if fully known, would not redound to her honour. And this he urged the more strongly, as he was certain the attack on him had been perpetrated by mistake, and that it was intended for his uncle. He was therefore infinitely more interested in bringing the villains to justice than if he had been the real object of their brutality. He trusted he should soon hear from her, and that her letter would tell him candidly all she knew of the matter, as, every other consideration apart if she did not, it would place him in a very painful position. Either he must side with her, or with the Keats family, who, he would not disguise from her, were much prejudiced against her. Did he do otherwise, he was certain it would cause a rupture between him and his betrothed, and he was fully convinced his dear aunt had too much love for him to wish, for one moment, such an event to occur. He concluded his letter by saying he should wait with impatience the arrival of her reply, when he hoped to find she had followed his advice.

The letter from Morecombe was written in a very different tone from his last. The communication he had received from Martha had evidently made a great effect on him, and he was now fully aware of his dangerous position. He

requested she would send the money to him in a registered letter, addressed to him in a false name, which he gave, and assured her that within forty-eight hours after its receipt he would quit the shores of England.

Morecombe's letter caused Martha but comparatively little anxiety. She evidently saw that the man was in a state of alarm at the danger of his position, and she had now no fear but that he would keep his word. Being Sunday, she knew she would not be able to get a letter registered, but she resolved on the morrow to drive to X—— for that purpose, trusting that her communications with Morecombe in this world would then cease. Her letter from Walter gave her far more uneasiness and thought, as she knew not what reply to make him. After reflecting for some little time, she determined not to reply at all. She could give him no excuse for her behaviour, and to send him the direct refusal she had given Mr. Keats might only tend to rivet stronger in his mind the suspicions she could plainly see, even through the affectionate tone of his letter, were arising in it. Terrible as was this thought, she was supported under it by the conviction that she was only carrying out the wishes of her

sister Charity; and although at the moment she could see no possibility of her ever appearing in a satisfactory light in the eyes of her nephew, still a certain hope seemed latent in her breast that in time all would end well.

The hour had now arrived for her to leave the house to attend morning service at the village church. Although unknown to her at the moment, her appearance in her pew caused no little excitement among the congregation. Even the eyes of the clergyman more than once wandered from the book before him to gaze on her. During the service Martha for the first time became aware that the eyes of all were upon her, and terribly she suffered under their gaze. When leaving the church, she found almost a crowd waiting to see her pass, and those whom she spoke to returned her courtesy with an expression of coldness, mingled with curiosity on their countenances. Even when she quitted the church-yard to cross the fields on her return home, she found several of the children from the village school were following her at a distance. Actuated by a momentary impulse, and being naturally fond of children, Martha turned round and addressed them with great kindness; but they merely stared for a moment

coolly at her, and then one by one turned back and ran away, without giving her an answer. The behaviour of the children struck more deeply into Martha's heart than any slight she had yet received, and hurrying home, she entered the house as rapidly as possible, to conceal from the servants the tears which were rolling down her cheeks.

Martha remained in her room the greater part of the day, but after nightfall she descended to the dining-room, taking with her Deborah's old Bible, possibly with the faint idea that it might act as a talisman to raise in her mind, as the evening before, the spirits of those whose memories she still so fondly loved. After the servants had retired to rest, she opened the Bible and commenced reading, watching anxiously for the finger of Deborah to make its appearance; but it came not. Martha read on, but with her mind only slightly fixed on the text before her, her thoughts at the time being employed upon those whose presence, whether visible or invisible, she so anxiously expected. Still they came not, and she turned her eyes towards the fireplace; but slight indeed was even the remembrance of the forms of her father and mother which came before her.

She now threw herself back in the chair, and pressing her hands together, prayed that Charity might visit her; but long as she waited for her sister's spirit, it came not. Several hours were passed in this way, with nought but disappointment to Martha; and at last, thoroughly down-hearted, she rose from her chair and sought her bedroom.

The next morning, when breakfast was over, she ordered the carriage, as it was her intention to send the letter to Morecombe, which she had already written, without delay. On passing the "Brickmakers' Arms," she noticed some men seated before the house drinking. With one exception they all rose from their seats, and looked at her with curiosity as she passed; while Martha recognised in the man who remained seated, but who had been in conversation with the others, the detective who had been employed to discover the assassins. She now drove rapidly on till she reached X——, when, stopping at the post-office, she registered her letter and posted it. Whether rightly or not, she imagined that every person she met at X—— stared at her in an unfriendly manner. The annoyance, most probably the effect of her own imagination, at length became so great,

that she determined to drive home again. Before, however, quitting the town, she saw advancing towards her Mrs. Wilson, the doctor's wife. For the moment Martha forgot her annoyance, and stopping the carriage, left it to speak to her friend. If Martha had been deceived in the unfriendly glances which she imagined were cast on her by those she met, it was not so with Mrs. Wilson, who received her with a coldness and sternness of manner which it was utterly impossible to mistake. Martha was upon the point of asking for an explanation, but the sorrow she felt at the reception Mrs. Wilson had given her allowed her merely to say,

"I am sorry, Mrs. Wilson, to see the unfriendly feeling you hold me in."

Mrs. Wilson made no reply, but, coolly bowing, continued her way; and Martha, again entering the carriage, returned to the Red House.

In the afternoon Martha determined to visit the village near the railway works, to see the poor creatures she had so often befriended, being fully persuaded she would there receive more kindness than she had hitherto met with. She was, however, doomed to be disappointed. The only difference she found was that the coldness of manner they shewed her was

mixed with a sort of impertinence, which rendered it doubly galling. Finding this state of things insupportable, she determined to return home. The children in the village followed her for a portion of the way, jeering and mocking her. Martha was not proof against this infliction, and her sorrow at their behaviour became so great, that she almost sunk under it, when the annoyance was put a stop to by a man who started out from the copse, and in an authoritative tone of voice, ordered the children back. Martha's first feeling towards the man was one of gratitude, the next of alarm, for she recognized in him the detective. She took no notice of him, but hurriedly continued her way home, and seeking her room, remained in it for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARTHA VISITS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

SOME days now passed over Martha's head without any further correspondence either from her nephew or Morecombe. She had during the time occasionally visited X——, but so unfriendly was the reception she met with from all who knew her, that she determined to confine her perambulations solely to the neighbourhood of the Red House. Here, however, she met with no better fortune. Possibly the slights she experienced from those with whom she was acquainted, and the almost insulting treatment from others whom she had formerly befriended, were even more painful to her than the rebuffs she had received in the town. The servants of the house, from the determined manner she could occasionally put on, and the resolution she had shown in dismissing the butler for his impertinence, now obeyed her implicitly; yet she fancied she could

perceive on their countenances an expression of coldness and dislike which galled her exceedingly. Although the idea might have been exaggerated, from the morbid state of her own feelings, the infliction became at last intolerable, and both her health and spirits began to sink under it. Her maid Cooper, who alone of all the other servants appeared unprejudiced by the reports which were extant as to the suspicious behaviour of her mistress, noticed her failing health, and with the familiarity of a favourite servant, asked Martha whether she had not better consult Dr. Wilson. Martha at first seemed greatly inclined to follow the girl's advice; but on second thoughts she remembered the cool reception Mrs. Wilson had given her, and she feared receiving the same from the doctor; and this would have pained her greatly, as she felt under a debt of gratitude to him for his former kindness to her.

She now gave up the idea of consulting Dr. Wilson, and determined instead to try what change of air would do for her; for although little disposed to be hypochondriacal, she could not disguise from herself that her health was failing fast. After a little consideration she resolved to make a somewhat lengthened visit to

the Isle of Wight, thinking probably that the change of air and scene might benefit her. Before putting her project into execution, she saw the necessity, as her brother had put the management of the Red House into her hands, of establishing continuity between it and herself. How to do this, however, puzzled her exceedingly. At last she determined to call on Mr. Gregory, her brother's solicitor, and place the state of the case in his hands, urging on him when she did so, that the advice he gave would greatly benefit her brother as well as herself. Having decided on this plan, the following day she called on Mr. Gregory, and found him at his office. To her great surprise he received her with more friendliness of manner than she had hitherto experienced from any of her acquaintances. When he remarked the appearance of ill health on her countenance, he assumed a kindness of tone which told most gratefully on Martha, who was so agitated at the moment that she had some difficulty in finding words to address him. Seeing her embarrassment, he placed her in the client's chair, and then said,

"Well, Miss Thornbury, I hope you have thought over the conversation we had together

when we last met in London, and that you have come to assist us in the work we have in hand."

"Mr. Gregory," said Martha, "I am sorry to say I have not called with any such intention. At the same time, I most sincerely hope I may some day be in a position which will enable me to erase from your mind the very justifiable suspicions which I know at present are on it."

"Nay, Miss Thornbury," said Mr. Gregory, "that is hardly the case with me. That there is a mystery about your behaviour I cannot unravel, is true; but from the knowledge I have had of you for many years, as well as judging from my experience in criminal practice—and I have in my time seen a good deal of it—I cannot bring my mind to imagine you have really taken any unworthy part in the transaction. More than that I cannot at present say. But now let me know the object of your visit. What is it?"

"I tell you, then, candidly, Mr. Gregory, that the annoyances I have received since my return to the Red House have had such a prejudicial effect on my health, that I shall sink under them if I do not try change of air and scene to renovate me. Now, when my brother left England, he

placed the management of the Red House in my hands, and if I leave it, I must have somebody in whom I can confide to superintend, during my absence, what takes place there, and I know of no one to whom I can apply but yourself. I beg you will not consider that in making this application I wish in any manner whatever to interfere with, or impede, any proceedings you may, in your duty, think it necessary to take against me. On the contrary, you will always know where I am to be found. My sole reason for applying to you arises from the conviction both my brother and I have of your perfect integrity and good feeling."

"I feel much flattered, Miss Thornbury," said the solicitor, "by the confidence you place in me, and the candour of your remarks, which, I may say, makes the mystery at present hanging over your behaviour still more inexplicable to me. As regards the Red House, I will take the superintendence of it with as much care as if it were my own, and when you are settled, if you will forward me your address, I will every week communicate with you, and let you know how affairs are going on."

"I am extremely obliged to you, Mr. Gregory, for your kind feeling, and the readiness you

show to oblige me. I think, then, my better plan will be at once to give you a cheque for current expenses, and if you will let me know when it is exhausted, I will send you another."

This arrangement meeting Mr. Gregory's views, Martha drew the cheque, and after wishing him good morning, drove back to the Red House, to make preparations for her immediate departure.

Martha, the next morning, without informing Cooper—who, to use her own phraseology, said she would accompany her mistress to the end of the world, or further, if she chose—where she was going, left the Red House for Ventnor, in the Isle of Wight. On arriving, she took an apartment for herself and maid, resolving to remain there for some time; and then, in case she did not find her health improve, she proposed visiting the south of France. The change of scene, combined with the sea air, certainly at first exercised a beneficial effect on Martha's health, but not to any very great extent. She remained in Ventnor during the winter, but as spring approached, she suffered a severe relapse, and the medical man who attended her advised her removal to a warmer climate.

Martha had great difficulty in making up her

mind on the subject. The fact was, it now wanted only six weeks to the wedding of her nephew and Fanny Keats, and she wished to remain in England till after it was over, that she might be able to fulfil the commission of her brother and sister-in-law, and forward the shawl and bracelet which had been intrusted to her. This she knew she could do by placing them in Mr. Gregory's hands, who, she was perfectly well assured, would follow out her wishes to the letter; but she had a latent hope, to be, if possible, present herself, though concealed in a distant part of the church, so that she might witness the ceremony. However, to form a plan to accomplish this was a difficult matter for her. Still, the wish was uppermost in her mind, and she resolved to carry it out, if she possibly could. All she feared was that her failing health would render her too feeble when the time came.

The doctor at Ventnor, finding Martha would not follow his advice and go to the south of France, proposed to her that she should place herself under the care of an eminent physician in London. He evidently began to entertain great anxiety as to the termination of her disorder, which had mixed with it certain psycho-

logical attributes which he was unable to understand. Occasionally he was inclined to believe her mind was affected; but then, again, her habitual shrewdness and intelligence on all ordinary matters negatived the idea. Martha easily understood that her doctor considered her case a hopeless one, and it is even probable, from the state of mind she was in, she would have remained quietly in Ventnor till her death. The idea, however, came before her that if she went to London, although her life might be prolonged but a short time, she would perhaps, under the advice of the physician to whom she was to apply, gain a sufficient increase of strength to allow her to be present at the wedding.

Governed by this idea, Martha now determined to do as her doctor had advised, and left Ventnor for London the following day. Soon after her arrival she had an interview with the physician, who, she easily perceived, considered her case a very serious one. Martha was perfectly willing to die, provided she could only gather sufficient strength to allow her to witness the wedding. She now wrote to Mr. Gregory to inform him she had arrived in London, and to request that he would continue to send

her the usual weekly report of what was going on at the Red House, with any letters that might arrive for her.

Two days afterwards Martha received Mr. Gregory's reply, and some letters which had come for her since he last wrote. Of the contents of Mr. Gregory's note there is no occasion at any length to trouble the reader. It gave a detail of the manner in which things had been passing at the Red House, as well as expressions of regret at the state of her health, and his satisfaction that she had determined to place herself under the care of an eminent London physician. Three letters were forwarded by Mr. Gregory. One was of no importance; another—she knew from the handwriting and Indian postmark—was from Edgar; the third, for the moment, she placed aside, as she did not recognize, from the manner in which the address was written, from whence it came; and yet, although the letters were misshapen and badly formed, it struck her she had seen the handwriting before. As her brother's letter interested her more than the others, she broke the seal and commenced reading it. The contents caused her great anxiety and sorrow. She had already received two from him since he left England, but from

their affectionate tone he had, at the time of writing them, evidently not heard of the heavy suspicion which weighed on her. His present letter, however, dwelt almost entirely on the subject. In it he told her he had received long letters, not only from Mr. Gregory and Mr. Keats, but also one from the Inspector of Police, all of which, he was sorry to say, placed her conduct in a most mysterious, if not suspicious light. What, he asked, could possibly induce her to remain silent on the subject? If this arose from a mawkish idea of not liking to get a fellow-creature into trouble, he could only express his unmitigated contempt for the excuse, as well as consider it a sign of the little love she must entertain both for himself and her nephew. Even apart from this consideration, it was her duty to assist in bringing to justice two such miscreants; and could she not see that by screening them she was possibly showing less mercy to others than to the villains themselves, as it was hardly to be supposed some fresh victims would not fall into their power. Although he regretted to say that all her friends seemed to hold grave suspicions of her conduct, and evidently considered she was indirectly concerned in the affair, he should be sorry to enter-

tain so bad an idea of her, and should therefore hold to the opinion that she was merely actuated by a morbid sentimentality which did her but very little credit. He insisted, he added, that if she deemed his affection and esteem of any value, she would immediately throw off an absurdity of the kind, and assist the police by every means in her power in bringing the villains to justice.

Poor Martha read and then re-read her brother's letter several times; still, with all her love for him, she saw that she could not depart from the course she had adopted, and she finally resolved not to answer him, but to let things take their course.

Martha now opened her other letter, which appeared a very long one. On glancing at the handwriting in the inside, she was as much puzzled to determine who the writer could be as she was on first seeing the superscription. It was evidently not unknown to her, and yet she could remember no other which was altogether like it. To relieve her doubts she now did what she might as well have done at the beginning—turned to the last page to see the signature. To her surprise she found it to be Morecombe's, and this surprise was still further

increased on seeing he had addressed it from St. Thomas's Hospital.

Martha commenced reading the letter with great attention. Morecombe told her that since he had last seen her nothing had prospered with him. He had faithfully kept his word to leave England after the receipt of the hundred-pound note she had sent him. Arrived in America, he had determined, if possible, to obtain a situation as clerk in a mercantile house, but unfortunately, having neither acquaintances nor referees there, he found it impossible—nobody would employ him. He afterwards tried the Western States, and endeavoured to find occupation as a farm-labourer. Here again he was unsuccessful. The better class of farmers, having money at their command, would only employ able-bodied men, whereas he was not only sinking in the vale of years, but his health was also rapidly failing him. The farmers who gave him any employment were all poor men, and the drudgery they imposed on him was more than his constitution could support. He had afterwards returned to New York, and with some difficulty succeeded in obtaining occupation as tapster in a disreputable spirit store. Here the fatigue he underwent was scarcely

less than he had experienced as a farm-labourer, while the temptation to drink was always before him; and although the master of the spirit store had great indulgence towards the vice of drunkenness when practised by his customers, in one of his servants he held it to be unpardonable, and he was again turned adrift in the world.

He then loafed about the city, occasionally getting employment, for which the remuneration he received was scarcely sufficient to keep body and soul together. At last he was attacked by a violent inflammation of the lungs, which brought him to the verge of the grave. When he had partially recovered, and was approaching a state of convalescence, he determined to write to her, and appeal to her charity for assistance. But then, how was he to live between the time of writing his letter and receiving her answer? Still it appeared to him that he had no alternative, and he had just commenced his letter to her, when an acquaintance told him that the steward of a liner, which was then upon the point of sailing from New York to London, wanted an assistant, and suggested that the appointment would just suit him. He offered his services, which were accepted, and

the ship left New York. He had been but a few hours at sea, however, when he found he had been cruelly deceived. Not only was he the drudge of the steward in the daytime, but he was also obliged to keep watch on deck at night. The weather was bitterly cold, and it brought on a return of his old complaint. Ill as he was, the captain of the ship would grant him no indulgence, and he was obliged to continue his duty, suffering the while not only from his disease, but from every species of insult and cruelty. The result was, when the ship arrived in London, he was so ill that he was compelled immediately to apply to the hospital for relief. Here he soon learnt the truth—that he was in a rapid decline, from which no human skill could save him. He had now made up his mind to die, but he hoped Martha would visit him before he expired, not only to inform him what had passed with regard to his sons since he had last seen her, but also that he might obtain from her own lips a pardon for the great injuries he had from time to time done her.

Martha, ill as she was, and suffering from the fatigue of her journey from Ventnor, resolved that afternoon to visit Morecombe. On arriving at his bedside, she found him so altered by

sickness she could hardly recognise him. Morecombe easily marked the expression of astonishment on her countenance.

"Well, Martha," he said, "I can perceive this time you are satisfied I am not deceiving you. No, my girl; no poor wretch was ever more irrevocably doomed to death without mercy than I am, and that in a few days. If you doubt me, ask any of the doctors in the ward, and they will confirm what I say, even if you did not consider the stamp of death, which is already on my face, sufficient proof without any protestations of mine. But, Martha," he continued, looking at her fixedly, and with a marked expression of sorrow on his countenance, "you appear very unwell yourself. Thank God, at any rate, this time I am not to be blamed for that!"

Martha could have told him, and with perfect truth, that he alone was to blame for it. It was the contumely which had been cast on her for the crime he had committed, preying on her heart, which had brought on the illness from which she was suffering. She said nothing more to him, however, than acknowledging that she felt very unwell.

"God forbid, Martha, that anything should

happen to you!" said Morecombe. "But now, tell me about my son Walter. Do you know, Martha," he continued, "that since I have been ill an idea has become fixed on my mind that, notwithstanding my evil life, Heaven does not withhold all pity from me. It was clearly proved to me on the terrible night when, in mistake for your brother, I attempted the murder of my own son. You see, Martha, I now disguise nothing from you. I was the villain who concocted that affair. Although I held the pony's head as firmly as if it had been in a vice, so as to give my companion the opportunity of striking my victim dead at one blow, the pony swerved. and the axe fell obliquely, and thereby saved Walter's life. The finger of Providence was clearly discernible in that—don't you think it was, Martha?"

"Indeed I do," said Martha. "But tell me why you formed the terrible idea of murdering my brother—for you evidently intended that he should be your victim."

"True, Martha, I did, for what animosity could I have against my own boy?"

"But my brother never gave you any provocation," said Martha, with great indignation in her tone.

"That is not altogether the case," replied Morecombe; "we will, however, let that part of the subject drop. I know your brother hated me, and I quite reciprocated the feeling. But now I will tell you the whole truth. The conversation I had with you when we met in the lane gave me the idea that, in case of your brother's death, the whole of the magnificent business he was head partner in would revert to my two sons, and that then I might myself become a partner in the firm. Nay, Martha," he continued, "do not look so horrified at what I am telling you, for I wish to conceal nothing. An open confession, they say, is good for the soul, and I may as well make mine full and open while I am about it."

"But," said Martha, shocked at the man's reckless tone, "are you not in dread of the punishment which will await you in the next world, after having led such a dreadful life in this?"

Morecombe remained for a few moments silent, and then said,

"I believe I ought to be terrified at it, Martha; but to tell you candidly the truth, I feel no fear. I do not deny the existence of a future state, but possibly from not having yet known what

fear was, I am unable to learn it now. I candidly admit, however—and that without any affectation of dissimulation—that in my sober moments I deeply and bitterly regret the wickedness of my past life, and the immense amount of misery I have caused to others. Tell me, Martha," he continued, looking at her with an expression of great seriousness in his face, "do you not consider that as a redeeming point in my character? If so, shew me how I can improve it, for you are more deeply versed in subjects of the kind than I am."

"Mr. Morecombe," said Martha, "to answer your question correctly is far above my ability. Why not appeal to the chaplain of the hospital? Lay open before him the state of your conscience, and follow his advice. He will be a far better authority on the point than I am."

"No, Martha," said Morecombe, after reflecting for a moment, "I will not speak to him. There are already too many acquainted with my misdeeds, and I have no wish to add to their number, though, I must admit, I should like some one to advise with me, and I have greater faith in you than in anyone else."

"Mr. Morecombe," replied Martha, "the subject is far above my capacity."

"But give me your opinion, at any rate, on this one point. I wish as far as possible to die at peace with those I have injured. Unfortunately there are now but two of them left, yourself and my son Walter. Of your forgiveness, Martha, I am certain, for you are too kind a soul to be implacable against anyone. But with respect to Walter, I know not how to act. I wish earnestly to obtain his forgiveness before I die, and yet dread inflicting on him the cruel shock he must receive when he learns that his own father is the villain who attempted to murder him. Tell me, Martha, what would you advise me to do; and be quick about it, for I find my strength sinking fast."

Martha reflected but for a moment, and then said, "I admit, Mr. Morecombe, the point is a most difficult one, and far above my ability to answer. But let me propose a course to you which not only might clear up the difficulty, but which, if you adopt it, would confer a favour on me as well."

"Name it," said Morecombe. "I pledge you my word I will adopt it, though it might solely be for the pleasure I shall feel in meeting your wishes."

"The father of the young lady to whom your

son is to be married," said Martha, "is, as you are aware, a clergyman. Let me write and ask him to visit you. He will be far better able to advise you on the point of bringing the subject under the notice of your son than I am, and will be able also to give you much religious consolation and instruction."

"Martha," said Morecombe, after a few moments' silence, "has Mr. Keats any idea that I was the person who tried to assassinate Walter?"

"Although he is ignorant that you are Walter's father, he, as well as the police authorities at X——, are fully persuaded that you were one of those who were concerned in the attempted murder."

"Then," said Morecombe, "he might still consider it his duty to give me in charge of the police. But no," he continued, with a sardonic sneer on his countenance, "that would be useless trouble, now, near as I am to my death. Besides, any publicity of the fact would merely give rise to a scandal, which, for the honour of his family, if he is a wise man, he would wish to avoid. Well then, Martha, I will follow your advice. Write to Mr. Keats as soon as you please, and let me know when to expect

him. I promise you I will make to him a full confession of my part in the attempted murder, and follow implicitly his advice whether I should obtain Walter's forgiveness, or keep him in ignorance that his father was the villain who tried to murder him. And now, Martha, I see the time has arrived for all visitors to leave the hospital. Good-bye, and God bless you for your charity in coming to see me; for badly as you may think of me, I am grateful to you for it. Now, write to Mr. Keats at once, and be sure to let me know when he will come. For yourself, Martha, I need not say, any visit you may pay me will be as acceptable as the visit of the angel to the sick people who were waiting for the troubling of the waters. You see I have not altogether forgotten my Scripture reading. Now once more good-bye, and get Mr. Keats here as quickly as possible, for I feel I am sinking fast."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY CLEARS UP.

WHEN Martha returned to her lodgings she was so exhausted with the excitement she had undergone, that she was seized with a succession of fainting fits, greatly to the alarm of her maid Cooper. Medical assistance having been procured, and restoratives given her, she somewhat recovered. She now turned over in her mind in what manner she should address Mr. Keats, but was unable, from excessive exhaustion, to bring her thoughts to bear with any clearness on the subject. She then resolved to put it off till the next day, and if she found her strength sufficient for the attempt, to take the train to X—— and pay Mr. Keats a visit, thinking she could much better explain matters to him in conversation than by writing.

The following morning found Martha far more depressed, both mentally and physically, than she had been the day before, and her visit

to X—— was an impossibility. She had now no alternative but to write to Mr. Keats, and this she did in a short letter, earnestly imploring him to visit her without delay, as she had matters of the greatest importance she wished to communicate to him. She told him she had intended going herself to X—— to see him, but her health was at the moment so infirm she was unable to undertake the journey. Martha also wrote a short note to Mr. Gregory, whom she now looked upon as the only person in X—— who regarded her with anything like kind feeling. In it she asked him to call on Mr. Keats and press him to accede to her request that he should visit her in London. By return of post she received a kind letter from Mr. Gregory, but none from Mr. Keats. The omission, however was explained in Mr. Gregory's letter, who told her that according to her wish he had called on Mr. Keats and found him absent, as he had gone for a short tour in North Wales, but was expected home in the course of four or five days. As his whereabouts during the trip would be very uncertain, it was not possible to place her letter in his hands till after his return. Mr. Gregory concluded her note by assuring Martha she need be under no apprehen-

sion, for although he would call on Mr. Keats and indorse her application, he was fully convinced that gentleman would willingly accede to her request without any extraneous aid being brought to bear on the subject.

Martha, though greatly disappointed at the delay Mr. Keats's absence would occasion, had no alternative but to submit to it with patience. She wrote a letter to Morecombe, informing him of it, and stating that she would willingly have paid him a visit herself, but that her health was so bad it was utterly impossible for her to leave the house. She begged of him to be patient under the delay, and in a few days she had no doubt Mr. Keats would pay him the anticipated visit.

During the next four days, Martha's health continued to decline, till at last she became so weak she was only able to rise from her bed in the afternoon, and was then wheeled in an easy-chair from her chamber into the drawing-room. On the fifth day, shortly after she had quitted the room, Mr. Keats was announced. When he entered there was a cold and somewhat stern expression on his face, which however changed to one of sympathy the moment his eyes fell on Martha, so terrible had been the alteration her

illness had caused in her appearance since he had last seen her. Forgetting the ill-feeling he had entertained towards her, he now advanced, and taking her hand, expressed his great sorrow at seeing her in so feeble a condition. Martha thanked him for his kindness, and having requested him to take a seat near her—for her voice was so weak it could hardly be heard—she commenced her narrative. She told Mr. Keats that the reason she had hitherto kept silent respecting the men who had attempted to murder her nephew, and the assistance she rendered one of them to escape from the hands of justice, arose from the fact that the principal culprit was no other than Morecombe, and she dreaded placing the terrible infliction on Walter of obliging him to appear in the witness-box against his own father. She also informed him that afterwards Morecombe had contrived to escape to America, but that he had since returned to England, and was now in a dying state in St. Thomas's Hospital. He had requested her to visit him, which she had done; and although she could hardly say he was in that penitent frame of mind so necessary to a man who was standing on the verge of the grave, he seemed to hold his past career in

sorrow and abhorrence. Among the many wicked acts he had committed, there was none which weighed so heavily on his mind as his attack on Walter, and he wished, if possible, to obtain his son's pardon, though he dreaded the cruel pang it would cause him when he was informed that the man who had attempted his life was his own father. "He asked me," continued Martha, "how he had better act, and I told him the subject was beyond my power to answer, and I proposed submitting it to you, as I felt certain, out of kind feeling to Walter, if from no other consideration, you would give him your best advice on the subject."

When Martha had concluded, Mr. Keats remained for some moments silent, with an expression of astonishment on his countenance, watching her attentively.

"And do I clearly understand, Miss Thornbury," he at length said, "that to spare Walter's feelings and the family credit, you have remained for so long a time patient under the suspicions which were rife against you, and the coldness not only of your casual acquaintances, but of your friends as well, who had mistaken the cause of your silence?"

"It appeared to me," said Martha, "that I

had no other course to pursue; nor should I now have spoken even to you on the matter, but for the difficult point of conscience existing not only in the mind of Mr. Morecombe, but in my own, as to the propriety of the wretched man, before his death, receiving his son's pardon."

"Miss Thornbury," said Mr. Keats, "it would be difficult for me to express the profound admiration I have for your conduct in the matter, and deeply do I grieve for the part I have taken against you. Pray pardon me, for be assured I am sincerely sorry for the error I have fallen into."

"There is no occasion, Mr. Keats, for any apology whatever," replied Martha. "Your conduct was perfectly natural, and such as might be expected from you; and I assure you I am more than compensated for the pain I have suffered at your justifiable suspicion, by your present kindness. But now, tell me, will you visit this wretched man? If so, it ought to be done without delay, for he is evidently very near death."

"I will go to him immediately," said Mr. Keats, "and then return and inform you of the result of my mission."

Mr. Keats now left Martha, to proceed to

St. Thomas's Hospital, and in about two hours' time returned to her again. He informed her that he had seen Morecombe, and held a conversation with him, and he had reason to hope the wretched man might yet be brought to a sense of the danger his soul was in. At the same time, without obtaining his son Walter's pardon, it would be impossible, he believed, for him to bring his mind into that proper state to allow him to profit by the consolations of religion. Acting under this idea, Mr. Keats had, he told her, already seen Walter, who, as might naturally be expected, was thunderstruck at the message he had received. As soon as he had somewhat recovered, and without a moment's hesitation, he agreed to visit his father. They then returned together to the hospital, where a very affecting scene took place between the father and son. It is hardly necessary to state that Walter unhesitatingly pardoned his father the injury he had received from him, and they remained together for some time. So overcome was Morecombe at the meeting with Walter, that at last it brought on a fainting-fit, and a physician being called, he advised that the interview should not be prolonged. At first Walter naturally wished to remove his father to a lodging, but the phy-

sician told him it would be utterly impossible in his present condition; in fact, he hardly thought, even with perfect quietude, he would live more than two or three days longer. It was then agreed that Walter should call alone on his father the next day, and as a perfect reconciliation had taken place between them, no doubt his son's presence would be a great consolation to the wretched man in his last moments.

Martha thanked Mr. Keats warmly for the trouble he had taken, and then asked him if he intended to return to X—— that night, as, if not, a bed could be prepared for him in the house. Mr. Keats told her he should spend the evening at Walter's, where he had already promised to remain for the night. Then, noticing that Martha appeared considerably fatigued, he bade her good-bye, and said he would call and see her again the next morning about noon.

On arriving at Walter's lodgings, Mr. Keats at once wrote a letter to Dr. Wilson, requesting, as a particular favour, that he would, if possible, come up to town by the first train the next morning and call on him, as he wished him to see Miss Thornbury, who appeared to be in a very alarming state of health. He then wrote another to Mrs. Keats, telling her about his in-

terview with Miss Thornbury, but without entering into any particulars of their meeting, beyond saying that he had reason entirely to change his mind with regard to her behaviour, and he now held her in the highest esteem and respect. Her state of health was at the moment most alarming, and, though he had but little experience in matters of the kind, he believed she could not last many days. It was more than probable, he said, that she might express a wish to see Fanny before her death, and he therefore wished her to be in readiness to come up to London at a moment's notice.

The next day about noon Dr. Wilson called on Mr. Keats, and heard of the alarming state of health Miss Thornbury was in, also that, from circumstances that had lately transpired, he had good reason to change his opinion of her behaviour, and he now esteemed her most highly. He could not, he told him, go into particulars at present, but possibly he might be able to do so on a future day.

"I have always had a latent idea in my mind," said Dr. Wilson, "that that poor creature was labouring under an unfounded suspicion; and I am very glad if it can be proved that I am correct, for she was always a great

favourite of mine. But now what is the matter with her?"

"I know nothing more," said Mr. Keats, "than that she appears in so weak a condition as to have but a few days' life in her. She is under the care of some physician of eminence in London; but, as you know her history and constitution better than most people, I thought, Wilson, you would have no objection to see her."

"On the contrary," said Dr. Wilson, "I shall be most happy to do anything I can for her. Is she in the house?"

"No, she has taken apartments some little distance off; but with a cab we shall be able to reach her in less than a quarter of an hour, and we had better be off at once."

On arriving at the house where Martha was, they were shown into the drawing-room, and shortly afterwards Cooper came to them. On inquiring of her how Martha was, the girl replied that her mistress was still sound asleep.

"Her nights are not disturbed, then?" said Dr. Wilson.

"Well, sir," said Cooper, "I hardly know what to say about that. It is true she remains perfectly quiet during the whole of the night; but always in the same position on her left side,

with her face turned towards the wall. But the curious thing is, that she is awake all the night, her eyes wide open, and as if she were watching some one standing by her bed; nor does she fall asleep till daylight."

"And you say she is fast asleep now?"

"Yes, sir. I tried to wake her a short time since, to give her some breakfast, but found it impossible."

"Can I go into her room?" asked the doctor.

"Oh! yes, sir, if you wish it."

"Come, Keats," said Dr. Wilson, "you had better accompany me. Nay, do not hesitate; you parsons are half medical men, and are entitled to the freedom of the craft."

They now entered Martha's bed-room, and found her, as the girl had said, in a sound sleep, with her breathing so low and quiet that at first sight it almost seemed as if life was extinct. After listening for a few moments, Dr. Wilson, without waking her, took her arm from beneath the clothes, and placed it upon the bed. He then felt her pulse with great attention, and said to Mr. Keats,

"Her pulse is better than I should have thought, considering the almost inanimate condition she appears to be in. Tell me," he said,

turning to Cooper, "did I understand you to say your mistress keeps awake all night?"

"Yes, sir," replied Cooper, "lying on her left side, with her eyes open, as I said before, as if watching somebody standing by the bedside."

Dr. Wilson was about replacing Martha's arm in the bed, and in doing so he slightly moved her pillow, under which he perceived a book. Without hesitation he drew it out, and opening it, found it to be a well worn prayer-book. On a blank leaf at the commencement was written—

"Martha Thornbury. From her dear sister Charity, on her seventeenth birthday."

It was the same Martha had found when examining the books in the Red House after the return of her brother to England. On the opposite cover was inserted a pocket, from which the doctor drew out a small paper packet, on which was written—

"A lock of little George's hair."

The doctor replaced the hair in the pocket, and holding the closed book in his hand, regarded Martha steadily for a few moments. He then proposed to Mr. Keats that they should leave the room, telling Cooper to inform them as soon as her mistress was awake.

As they were quitting the room, Cooper said to Dr. Wilson,

"Oh! sir, please don't take my mistress's prayer-book, for she will miss it when she wakes."

"No matter," said Dr. Wilson, "you tell her as soon as she opens her eyes that I am here, and wish to speak to her, and leave the rest to me."

As soon as the doctor and Mr. Keats were alone in the drawing-room, the former said,

"I very much suspect that poor woman's mind is as much diseased as her body, and possibly more so. This book gives me a clue to the whole mystery, which I will endeavour to work out as soon as she awakes."

"But what can you judge from it?" asked Mr. Keats.

"Well, I hardly know what answer to give till I see her. But in this book are two memorials of those who are now dead and gone—one of her sister, of whom she was intensely fond, and the other of a little brother who died in his infancy. I should not at all wonder if the poor creature, suffering under the slights which have been offered her by her friends in consequence of the suspicions against her, under

which we have all been labouring, has bent the whole force of her mind upon those she formerly so fondly loved. She has no doubt unconsciously formed the wish to join them, and that wish acting on her delicate constitution, has brought her to her present condition. It is very probable I shall be able to draw the whole truth from her as soon as I talk with her."

"Do you think there is any occasion for me to wait?" asked Mr. Keats. "I have an appointment with Walter this afternoon, which I should like to keep."

"None whatever," replied Dr. Wilson. "I will meet you at dinner, and will then tell you what has taken place."

About two o'clock Cooper entered the drawing-room and told Dr. Wilson her mistress was awake. The doctor accompanied the girl into the room, and found Martha sitting up in bed, with a bewildered expression of countenance, as if she could hardly believe the possibility that she was about to receive a visit from her old friend.

"You seem surprised to see me, Miss Thornbury," said the doctor, gaily. "Well, if anybody had told me at eight o'clock this morning that I should have paid you a visit in the afternoon, I should have looked as surprised as you

do now, or possibly thought him insane. Yet, you see, here I am, and I hope you will give me a warm welcome."

"Most joyfully, Dr. Wilson," said Martha, her eyes filling with tears, and her voice scarcely audible from weakness. "Most joyfully do I welcome you. But now tell me what induced you to visit me?"

"From hearing that you were ill, of course," said the doctor. "You don't suppose I could hear that my old patient, in whom I was so interested, was ill, and not wish to see her. No, as soon as I heard from Mr. Keats of your indisposition, I left X—— by the next train. I arrived in town some hours since, but when I first saw you, you were so fast asleep I did not like to disturb you."

"You have seen me already!" said Martha with a look of surprise on her face.

"Yes, and felt your pulse without your being aware of it. By-the-bye," he continued, drawing Martha's prayer-book from his pocket, "on slightly removing the bedclothes, more conveniently to get at your arm, in order to feel your pulse, I saw this book under your pillow. Now, as I never can see a book without wishing to examine it, I took it away with me into the

next room." So saying, he placed the book again in Martha's possession, who, slightly colouring, looked at him in an anxious and embarrassed manner. "But now," continued the doctor, "let us speak on more serious subjects, and tell me of what it is you complain."

"There is nothing that I can complain of," said Martha, "except that I get daily weaker, and am fully convinced I am sinking fast."

"That is all very sad," said the doctor; "but now it must be my task to prevent your sinking lower. Do you find your appetite good?"

"I have none whatever," said Martha.

"Do you sleep well at nights?" asked the doctor, looking at her with so much fixedness in his gaze that Martha almost quailed beneath it.

"No, I do not," was her reply.

"And yet you sleep well in the morning. I have never seen a person in a sounder sleep than you were when I first came into your room this morning, and your maid tells me it is the same every day. She says you fall into a sleep shortly after daybreak, and that she cannot wake you for many hours."

"Possibly that may have occurred from the great anxiety of mind I have been in for the

last few days, and which has fatigued my brain terribly."

"Still, that does not explain your keeping awake at night," said Dr. Wilson. "To what cause do you attribute that?"

Martha made no reply, but gazed at him plaintively, as if imploring him not to press the question. The doctor easily understood her, and said,

"Well, we will talk no more of that now, but remember this, I insist on your taking nourishment, and, in fact, following my orders to the letter, otherwise I shall return at once to X——."

"Although I am persuaded your skill will do me no service, I am too pleased to see you not to follow your advice to the best of my ability. You cannot think how happy you have made me," she continued, the tears running down her cheeks, "by coming to see me. I thought you, in common with all my other old friends, looked upon me as little better than an outcast, and I am happy indeed to see that at least in your case I was mistaken."

"My dear Miss Thornbury, I never had any suspicion of you in my life. That I might have thought you were acting under a very reprehensible principle of false humanity is possible.

At the same time, I can assure you I always held you in the greatest respect. But now I see you are getting tired, and I had better take my leave."

"Indeed I am not," said Martha, "so pray do not hurry away."

"Well, I am the best judge of that," said the doctor. "I shall now leave you, but you will see me to-morrow. And remember this, I shall call earlier than I did to-day, so you must sleep more at night and wake sooner in the morning. I almost think," he continued, slowly and emphatically, gazing at her attentively the while, "you had better let me take that little book with me. I think perhaps you would sleep better without it."

Martha's ordinarily pallid countenance in a moment became the colour of crimson, for she felt that the man of science, notwithstanding his easy, half jocular method of expressing himself, had read her inmost thoughts. She made him no reply, however, and he, taking her hand, said to her with great sympathy in his tone,

"Come, come, I see we perfectly understand each other. Let me take that book away, and I promise you I will give it you again before I return to X——." Then without waiting for her

answer, he bade her good-bye and left the room.

On quitting Martha, Dr. Wilson, without delay, proceeded to Walter's apartments, where he found that Mr. Keats and his future son-in-law had entered just before him. He had no difficulty in perceiving that Walter had been crying, and that there was a very serious expression on Mr. Keats's countenance. After speaking for a few moments to Walter, whom he had not yet seen, Dr. Wilson was asked by Mr. Keats how he had found Miss Thornbury, and what hopes he entertained of her ultimate recovery.

"I will not disguise from you," said the doctor, "that she is certainly in a very precarious condition; still I am not without hopes for the future, but to effect her recovery will require great tact and judgment."

"What do you consider her complaint?" asked Mr. Keats. "Not consumption, I hope?"

"It is more than probable," said Dr. Wilson, "that the seeds of consumption have already taken firm root in her; but as I did not carry my examination far enough, I cannot speak with certainty on that point. At the same time, I am fully convinced that her present lamentable condition is more the effect of mental malady (I

won't say insanity in the usual acceptation of the word, for, understand me, there is no madness connected with it), preying on her already debilitated constitution.

"But what can have caused it?" inquired Mr. Keats.

"I have not gone sufficiently deeply into the case yet to pass a decided opinion," said Dr. Wilson, "but I am inclined to think that the suspicion and contumely cast on her by her old friends have in a great measure been the cause of it. I do not know whether I told you that, during the time she was actually starving in the Red House, she suffered under the hallucination that the phantoms of the deceased members of her family used to visit her in the night and console her. From what her maid told me of her lying awake all night, apparently gazing on some object visible only to herself, I strongly suspect she is again suffering under the same idea, and perhaps unconsciously it has brought on the wish to join them in another world. I am the more convinced of this, from having found under her pillow that old prayer-book I shewed you, which appears to have been given her by her deceased sister, and, as you saw, also contains a lock of hair of a young brother who died

in his infancy. I brought the book away with me, as I am fully persuaded it is the connecting link between her mind and the phantoms she conjures up. I shall, however, question her more on the subject when she gets stronger."

"What steps do you intend to take for her cure?" inquired Mr. Keats.

"Well, the probability of her cure will in a great measure depend upon you and the rest of her friends. If they still continue to shew her the disrespect, justifiable as it may be, which they have done for some time past, she will assuredly die, and that very soon. If, on the contrary, they are willing to receive her in the same friendly manner that you did yesterday, her case is by no means hopeless."

"It shall be no fault of mine," said Mr. Keats, "if all do not for the future hold her in greater affection than they did before her mysterious conduct brought those unfavourable suspicions on her. They are now, however, all cleared up, and much to her honour. I have no doubt you will shortly be in possession of the whole of the facts: but before making them public, it would be better if we had a family meeting on the subject, to determine what steps we shall take. And now tell me, what can we do to assist in her recovery?"

"The first thing we must aim at," said the doctor, "is to drive off that atony which is fast creeping on her mind, and, in its turn, acts upon her body. In her case the will also exercises an immense power over her physical constitution; and if we could rouse her from her torpor and make her wish to live, there is yet a probability we may succeed. This must be done, however, with great caution. One by one, her old friends should call on her, so as to continue the excitement, without making it too violent at first."

"What do you think of my sending for my daughter Fanny?" inquired Mr. Keats. "I would have proposed that Walter should call to see her, but his spirits are not of the best to-day, and they might serve to depress her."

"You could not do better than send for your daughter," said the doctor, "and let her come as quickly as she can—indeed, I should much like to take her with me when I pay my visit to Miss Thornbury to-morrow morning."

"That can easily be done," said Mr. Keats. "I will write to her immediately, and before noon to-morrow she can be here."

The following morning Fanny Keats arrived, having come up from X—— under the escort of

a friend who was leaving by an early train. Fanny was delighted to receive her father's permission again to be on affectionate terms with Miss Thornbury, whom she held in the highest estimation. Under pretence of making a purchase in the neighbourhood, Dr. Wilson left Mr. Keats with his daughter for a short time, thinking that they might wish to have a little private conversation together. As soon as they were alone, Mr. Keats, noticing a disappointed look on his child's countenance, said to her,

"I daresay, Fanny, you were surprised at not finding Walter here to receive you, but in being absent he has merely followed my advice. The fact is, an extraordinary circumstance has lately taken place, which although it may turn to be a subject of joy to others, is, for the present, one of deep sorrow to Walter."

"Ought not I then to see him?" said Fanny.

"I thought not, my dear," replied her father, kindly. "But now let me tell you what has taken place, and you will see I am acting with reason."

Mr. Keats then gave his daughter a rapid description of the discovery that Walter's own father was the intended assassin; that Martha

was aware of the circumstance, and had concealed the fact out of respect to Walter's feelings. The wretched man was at that moment dying in St. Thomas's Hospital, and his son was by his bedside. There was no chance, he told her, of Mr. Morecombe's outliving the day, and therefore he thought it would be better for Walter not to be aware of her having come to town till after his father's death and funeral, which would probably take place in a day or two. Mr. Keats impressed on Fanny that if Walter was aware she had been made acquainted with the circumstances of the case, it might add an additional pang to the grief he was already suffering. "In a few days," he continued, "Walter will be more himself, and then, my dear, your attempts to console him will be far more efficacious than they would be at the present moment."

Fanny was obliged to admit the correctness of her father's reasoning, and a few minutes after their conversation was ended, Dr. Wilson returned. They all three now hurried off to Martha's apartments, and were ushered into the drawing-room, where they were met by Cooper. To the doctor's inquiry as to how her mistress had passed the night, the girl replied that she

had seemed uneasy, although she had fallen asleep on more than one occasion, and that for some time together,

"She is now awake, sir," continued Cooper, "and seemed anxious to see you."

Dr. Wilson, having asked Mr. Keats to remain in the drawing-room a few minutes longer, took Fanny with him into the bedroom.

"I have brought you another nurse, Miss Thornbury, who will relieve Cooper of part of her duties," said Dr. Wilson, on entering; "and one whose attentions I am sure you will willingly receive."

When Martha saw Fanny Keats, she attempted to speak, but was unable to find words, and the next moment they were in each other's arms, and both seemed overjoyed at their meeting. Shortly afterwards they were joined by Mr. Keats, when an animated conversation took place between them, in which Martha took her full share. Indeed, had it not been for the two well-defined red spots marked on her cheeks, it might have been thought the meeting with her old friends had done her malady good service. Occasionally she would look anxiously at Mr. Keats, as if there were some question she wanted to ask, and which he

perfectly well understood was concerning Morecombe, but he determined to avoid answering her —at any rate, until the death of the wretched man had taken place. Martha went so far as to ask Fanny if she had seen Walter. Fanny was somewhat embarrassed what reply to give, but her father came to her relief.

"Fanny has not yet seen Walter, for she came here shortly after her arrival in London. I do not think she will see him to-day, and possibly not to-morrow. I hope in the course of a day or so he will come and see you, for you are, I can assure you, as dear to him as ever."

Martha gazed anxiously at Mr. Keats when he spoke, as if waiting to hear something more. He remained silent, however, and she easily imagined it was something connected with Morecombe that kept Walter away, and therefore thought she had better say nothing more on the subject. Symptoms of fatigue beginning to show themselves, the doctor proposed that their visit should terminate, with the exception of Fanny, who was to remain with Martha for the present, a bed having been prepared for her in the house. When they quitted the room, Fanny accompanied her father to the door, who said to her before leaving,

"My dear, in case Miss Thornbury should ask you any questions respecting Walter, and his absence from home, tell her as cautiously as you can the state of the case—that Mr. Morecombe cannot last the day out, and Walter remains at his bedside, but that as soon as the funeral is over he will call to see her. In case he should die in the course of the day, I will send a messenger to you in the evening and you can inform her at your own discretion. But be very careful in what way you do it, for Dr. Wilson says she is in a very precarious condition, and we must take great care not to over-excite or fatigue her. Now, God bless you, my child. To-morrow I will see you again. Keep up Miss Thornbury's spirits as well as your own, and I trust, with the blessing of the Almighty, her life may yet be spared, and we shall have her amongst us again.

CHAPTER X.

NEWS FROM INDIA.

MORECOMBE died the evening of the day Fanny Keats arrived in London, and a message to that effect was forwarded to her by her father. She had already informed Martha of the state Morecombe was in, and that he could not last another day. Although a feeling of awe came over Martha when she heard the news, it would be wrong to say she was either greatly surprised or shocked; and when Fanny communicated to her the contents of her father's note in the evening, announcing that his death had taken place, Martha merely replied,

"May God forgive him! I trust his death was better than his life. Let us speak no more of him. He has, it is true, been a source of constant sorrow to us, but the grave should cover all."

That night Martha slept but little, though possibly her wakefulness did not partake of the

same character which Cooper had remarked before the arrival of Dr. Wilson. She seemed, on the contrary, to be deeply absorbed in thought, probably reflecting over the different episodes in her life which had taken place since she first made Morecombe's acquaintance. When day broke she fell into a very easy slumber, from which she did not awake till the arrival of Mr. Keats and the doctor. As the former entered the room Martha cast on him an expressive glance, indicative that she knew all. Mr. Keats merely nodded to her, as if he understood her meaning, but not a word passed between them concerning Morecombe's death. The doctor conversed but a short time with her, and then left the room, followed by Mr. Keats. When in the drawing-room, the latter asked Dr. Wilson his opinion of his patient's health.

"Candidly, then, there is no improvement since yesterday," was the reply. "On the contrary, her pulse is feebler, and she is generally weaker. This may partly be accounted for by the shock of some intelligence I understand she has received, and, as I told you before, with her the mind acts with fearful power on the body."

"What can be done for her?" inquired Mr. Keats.

"All we can do is to keep her mind employed as much as possible on pleasing subjects. The sooner her nephew visits her the better."

"That he will be able to do the day after to-morrow," said Mr. Keats.

"Then you must bring before her the approaching wedding. If anything will arouse the atony which weighs on an old maid's mind, it is by interesting her on a subject of the kind. If we can get over the next two or three days, I have great hopes we shall be able gradually to bring her round. I much doubt, however, if, under any circumstances, we could succeed so as to allow her to be present at the wedding. But no matter about that, if we can save her life, that is the great object at present."

"I will tell Fanny," said Mr. Keats, "to keep up Miss Thornbury's spirits as much as possible, and I have no doubt, when she is able to see Walter, it will exercise a most beneficial effect upon her."

Three days afterwards, Walter, who had the previous day attended the funeral of his father, called at Martha's apartments. Fanny was the first to see him, and so great was her joy that at first sight she did not remark the deep mourning he was in. They conversed together

for some time, happy indeed at their meeting. Fanny then proposed she should take him in to see his aunt. It would be impossible to describe the pleasure Martha felt at again seeing her nephew. Throwing her arms round his neck, she for some time wept so bitterly that at last Fanny was obliged to interfere.

"Come, Miss Thornbury," she said, "do not weep so; you ought to be happy at seeing him again."

"They are tears of joy, my dear," said Martha. "Now, indeed, I shall die contented."

"Nonsense, aunt," said Walter. "I must not have you talk in that manner. I shall want you to dance at my wedding. You seem to have forgotten all about it."

"It would have given me great joy, dear," said Martha, smiling sadly, "but that happiness will not be for me. The Lord's will be done!"

"I tell you what it is, Miss Thornbury," said Fanny, "if you talk in that manner I shall get the doctor to speak to you. I know you are afraid of him, if you are not of anyone else."

In spite of herself, Martha could not help laughing, but she told Fanny not to speak to the doctor about anything of the kind. Fanny, however, kept to her resolution; and when Dr.

Wilson called, she took the opportunity of seeing him alone first, and then taking him to Martha's room, she left him and his patient by themselves.

"Well, Miss Thornbury," he said to her, "I understand you slept better last night than you did the night before."

"I did," she replied, "but I feel very weak this morning."

"That I can imagine from the state of your pulse. But now let us talk seriously over the matter. Without any figure of speech, your life and death are in your own hands, and dependent on your own will."

"How so?" said Martha.

"Do you know the meaning of the phrase *volere et potere?* With you that faculty is stronger than in any person I have ever met with. Earnestly wish to live, and you will live. If, on the contrary, you persist in wishing to die—which to my certain knowledge you have been doing for some time past, though perhaps unconsciously to yourself—and you will certainly succeed."

"Doctor," said Martha, looking earnestly at him, "you do not know all."

"Then tell me all," he said. "It is unfair

for a patient to conceal anything connected with the state of her health from her medical adviser."

"I am afraid you will hardly believe me if I do."

"I know no person," he replied, "in whose veracity I would more readily confide than your own. At the same time, I hold it possible you may be in error."

"I am not in this case, Dr. Wilson," said Martha.

"Let me know all, and then I will judge for myself."

"Well, then," she said, "at the risk of your doubting me, for many weeks past the shade of my sister Charity has night by night stood there, by the left side of my bed, and told me that I shall soon be with her in heaven."

"Not in words, I presume?" said Dr. Wilson.

"No, but I clearly understood her."

"Of that I am by no means certain," said the doctor, humouring her. "Is it not possible that her visit may have been intended as a consolation to you in your trouble?"

"No," said Martha, an expression of doubt, however, appearing on her countenance. "No, I could not have been mistaken."

"And you say the shade of your sister continues to visit you every night?"

"Till the last two or three," said Martha, hesitatingly.

"Indeed!" remarked the doctor. "Might her absence not be accounted for by the fact that brighter times are in store for you, and that her presence was not so much needed?"

"I can hardly think so," said Martha, after a moment's silence. "No, I certainly could not have been mistaken."

"Nor do I think I am in error," said the doctor. "But possibly we might ascertain which of us is correct, and that to a positive certainty."

"In what way?" inquired Martha.

"You are of opinion that your sister's shade visits you to inform you that you will soon join her in another world. If she visits you again, I will admit your supposition to be right. If, on the contrary, she does not appear again, you shall admit the possibility of your being in error, and that I have arrived at a just conclusion on the subject. What do you say to my proposition?"

"I hardly know what reply to make to it," said Martha. "Still, if Charity does not appear

again, I will admit the strong probability that I am in error."

"Well, then, I ask no more," said Dr. Wilson. "Let it stand so between us. I tell you," he continued, raising his voice, and speaking with considerable decision,—almost authority—in his tone, "the phantom of your sister will appear to you no more, and you will find I am right in what I say."

The next morning, when the doctor called, before entering Martha's chamber, he inquired of Fanny Keats what sort of a night she had passed. Fanny, in reply, told him that she understood from Cooper, who had sat up with her, that she had passed a better night than usual. She was a little restless at the commencement, but had fallen asleep soon after midnight, nor did she awake till it was time for her breakfast.

Dr. Wilson now entered his patient's room, and after making the ordinary inquiries respecting her health, asked whether her sister Charity had visited her the evening before. "Although," he said, "I have no occasion to ask you, for I am fully persuaded she did not."

"You are right, Dr. Wilson," said Martha; "but I have a favour to ask of you. Will you

return me my prayer-book which you took away?"

"Certainly I will. I anticipated that you would demand it of me this morning, and have brought it with me. But I understand you perfectly well," Dr. Wilson continued, "and you are in error when you imagine that having possession of your sister's book will have anything to do with the visit you expect from her. There it is. Now place it under your pillow, in the same position I found it the first morning I visited you; and believe me, notwithstanding the book is there, your sister will not come."

"What makes you so certain upon that point?" asked Martha.

"I will give you my reasons when I see you to-morrow," he replied. "And now let us talk of other subjects. You are much better than you were yesterday, although still lamentably weak. Have you seen your nephew this morning?"

"I have," replied Martha. "He called for a few minutes before going to his office, and he has promised to come again this evening."

"Well, that is all right," said the doctor. "The more frequently you see him the better. But now I must break off this hurried visit, for

my wife has sent me up several commissions to execute for her; and to-morrow, after I have seen you, I must return to X——, as my patients are grumbling loudly at my absence."

"But you are surely not going back so soon?" inquired Martha, with an expression of alarm on her countenance.

"I am indeed. But I shall get Miss Keats to send me every day a bulletin of your health, and if I find there is the slightest danger of a relapse, I shall immediately return to London, as I am determined, in spite of yourself, you shall not slip through my fingers this time. Now, good-bye, and don't forget the prayer-book. When night comes think well of what I have told you,—that the shade of your sister will not visit you again. My reasons for coming to that conclusion I will tell you more at length when I see you to-morrow."

The next day, when Dr. Wilson paid his visit, he found Martha already dressed, and sitting in an easy chair in the drawing-room.

"Well," he said, "I need not ask how you are this morning, for I easily perceive you are much better. But tell me, now, what occurred last night. Was I right in my prognostications?"

"You were," said Martha. "But tell me

candidly what made you so certain I should not see my sister Charity?"

"That," said the doctor, after a little consideration, "is a somewhat difficult question to answer; though to a brother medical man I could do so easily enough. In the first place, then, I will look at the question from your point of view, and, for the sake of argument, admit you to be right in your idea that the shade of your sister did formerly visit you."

"Do you doubt my word?" said Martha.

"As I think I told you before, there is no person in the world in whose veracity I have greater reliance than your own," said the doctor, evading the question. "But let me go on. When in sorrow, and that sorrow caused by no fault of your own, the shade of your sister visited you, and afforded you unspeakable consolation—so much so, that at last you wished to join her in another world, principally from the love you bore her, and partly to escape from the unmerited contumely and persecution (for I now know all) you were suffering in this. But now the persecutions have ceased; all again love and respect you, regret the injustice they did you, and you have before you, if you choose to accept it, every prospect of happiness. Your

sister's visits then being no longer requisite, you will see her no more."

"But," said Martha, "you cannot be certain that I shall recover—I have little hope of it myself."

"Then the best thing you can do is to increase that hope. Think of the use you may still be of in the world, not only to the children, but the grandchildren of your sister; for nothing is more probable, if you live, than that you may be called upon to assist in bringing up your nephew's children."

Here the old maid, thinking it would be improper for her to understand the allusion, tried to put on a staid expression of countenance, which only provoked a laugh from the doctor. Martha, for a moment longer, attempted to maintain her gravity, but the next, finding it impossible to play the prude in the presence of the old family doctor, she threw off any further affectation, and said, "I acknowledge the idea is a most attractive one, and it would give me much pleasure, were I sure I should live to see the time when I could assist in educating my nephew's children, for I am sure Fanny and I will always be good friends and intimates."

"Of that I am persuaded," said Dr. Wilson,

"for you are a woman of too much tact to make yourself ultra-officious to a young mother. But now promise me you will keep up your spirits as much as you can. With an increase of good spirits, depend upon it you will have an increase of strength. I should also propose that you take a furnished house somewhere in the environs of London—say Richmond, or Clapham—so that you may profit by the air of the country, for it will be some time before you are strong enough to travel any distance."

They were now interrupted by the entrance of Fanny Keats and her father.

"I have been telling Miss Thornbury," said Dr. Wilson, after Mr. Keats had spoken to Martha, "that the best thing she can do, as soon as she gains a little strength, is to remove from London somewhere into the country, as I want her to get sufficiently strong to be present at the wedding."

"I do not think it very probable," said Martha, smiling.

"I am not so sure of that," said Mr. Keats. "One reason for my calling on you to-day is to tell you that we have received this morning a hurried letter from your brother, in which he says he has arranged all his affairs in Calcutta,

and placed the business in the hands of his nephew, and that he and his wife intended leaving India the next week, and hoped to reach England in time for the wedding. I have had this morning a long consultation with Fanny, who is so anxious your brother and his wife should be present, that we have determined to postpone the event for another month; and by that time, Miss Thornbury, I think there will be little doubt that you will be able also to join us on the happy occasion."

This intelligence gave Martha the greatest satisfaction. True, she thought it probable that her brother, who held Morecombe in such strong aversion, might at first feel somewhat angry with her at her attempts to shield him from justice; but the wretched man was dead, and she had too much reliance on Edgar Thornbury's goodness of heart to believe him capable of carrying his animosity beyond the grave. The doctor, who had been watching Martha attentively for some moments, seemed instinctively to know her thoughts, and said to her,

"And so now, Miss Thornbury, you have another reason for wishing to recover your strength. After all, you will find I am right.

If I were not as old a man as I am, and that it would be somewhat out of place in my character as an old family doctor, I should ask you to be my partner in dancing at the wedding."

Martha merely told the doctor not to talk such nonsense, as her dancing days were long past, even if she were well enough to be present.

"And now, Miss Thornbury," said Mr. Keats, "do you intend to carry out the doctor's advice and take a furnished house in the neighbourhood of Clapham, or some other suburb of London? If my opinion has any weight, I should distinctly advise you to do so. At the same time, I must admit I do not speak altogether from unselfish motives. I must return home at once, as I have been absent long enough from my duties, but to-morrow I shall send up my wife, who will remain in London to assist Fanny in the preparations for her marriage. Now, if a house is taken for you in the outskirts, I think you might all reside together, and she might profit by your advice in the purchases she intends making. Then, again, there is the furnishing of the house to be gone on with; for as yet Walter has been so occupied with business he could not attend to it. My wife has been so great an invalid she could not come up to Lon-

don, and her sister Mrs. Cheyne, as you know, left town some months since, and everything has remained in abeyance. Now, however, there is a double duty to do, and as we are taught that in the multiplicity of opinions there is wisdom, I hope you will assist your nephew and Fanny by advising them in the purchase of their furniture. If I am not mistaken, your brother, before he left England, requested you to do so."

"He did," said Martha. "But still, you must see yourself, that with every wish to be useful to them I should hardly have the strength."

"Let us hope for the best," said Mr. Keats. "I shall advise Walter to apply to some respectable house-agent to find you a house in the outskirts, and in a day or two, if you have no objection, Mrs. Keats will join you."

Martha assured Mr. Keats that the society of his wife would be a great pleasure to her, and after little more conversation the Reverend gentleman and the doctor took their leave, and returned to X—— the same day.

During the next week, Martha continued slowly, but perceptibly, to improve in health and strength. True to Dr. Wilson's prognostications, her sister's phantom did not again visit

her, and she began to entertain the idea, which to humour her he had pretended he believed, that the shade of her sister visited her during her trouble, and would no longer do so when brighter prospects were before her. Martha now felt convinced she should recover, and as the conviction became more apparent to her, her mind acted on her frame, and she gathered strength in proportion. Walter succeeded in finding a ready-furnished house for his aunt and future mother-in-law in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park, he preferring that locality as being easiest of access for him after business hours were over than either of those proposed by Dr. Wilson.

They were soon joined by Mrs. Keats, who seemed pleased with the arrangement; and, with her daughter Fanny, they commenced making the necessary purchases for the wedding outfit. Martha was not at first able to accompany them or to be absent for more than a short time from the house, but she seemed to take a great interest in the different purchases they made, and would inspect them with a minuteness scarcely less than Fanny herself. At length Martha's strength increased sufficiently to enable her to go about with them, and then Walter also join-

ed them in their visits to the upholsterers, where long and deep consultations were held respecting the furniture best adapted for the new house in Kensington, which had been ready for their reception for more than three months past. Carpets were purchased and laid down, mirrors placed in the different positions intended for them, tables, hearthrugs, chandeliers, bedroom furniture, kitchen-battery, and in fact every necessary for the right furnishing of a house followed in due succession. As the furniture arrived, and the house assumed a more habitable appearance, great was the satisfaction of the young couple; while Martha's happiness was perhaps greater in noticing the pleasure of her nephew and his future wife.

At last all was so completely in readiness that, through the ingenuity of the young people, stimulated and assisted, as it was, by the persuasions and advice of the upholsterers and different tradesmen, there did not appear a single other article that could be purchased with any consistency; and Mrs. Keats and Martha were now left, for their sole occupation, the consideration of the wedding-dresses. Fanny had but little difficulty in choosing the one she intended to wear on the occasion, but it was a long time

before Martha could be persuaded to purchase hers. The idea of her being able to be present at the ceremony seemed to be so utterly adverse to the conclusion she had already arrived at—that her state of health was too infirm to allow her to join the wedding-party—that she seemed almost to think she would appear ridiculous did she admit herself in the wrong. Still, as the day approached she began to feel so much interest in all that was going on, that at last she gave way, and consulted Fanny and Mrs. Keats about her own dress. Of course they were but too pleased to give their opinion, and complimented her highly on the decision she had come to; and, fearing lest she might change her mind, they proposed at once to accompany her to Swan and Edgar's, where they should be able to see a variety of suitable dresses, and could then select one for the occasion. The carriage was ordered, and in less than an hour they had arrived at that celebrated emporium of fashion, and soon had placed before them so many specimens of dresses, that they were fairly puzzled which to decide upon. Martha at last determined on selecting a rich dove-coloured silk, considering it better adapted than any other to her age and appearance. Fanny somewhat differed from her,

and persuaded her to have another dress of a warmer and more brilliant appearance; but Martha kept firm to her resolution, and the dove-coloured silk was purchased. Why she should have chosen that particular colour it would be difficult to say, seeing that others might have suited her appearance equally well. Possibly it was from the appreciation and remembrance of all that had passed in her childhood that she had conceived a respect for the colour which had been invariably worn by her mother, who, although after her marriage she had given up many of her Quaker habits, still retained to a considerable extent their simplicity with regard to colour and form in her dress. Martha, from earliest childhood till almost the last hour of her mother's life, had been accustomed to see her wearing a silk dress of the shade she had just selected, and, from the love she bore her parent, unconsciously accepted it in her own mind as the one most to be admired.

The silk was sent to the dressmaker's the next day, with orders from Martha how it was to be made up. To say the truth, Martha almost drove the poor French *modiste* out of her wits on the occasion. She not only set aside all her Paris *modes*, but insisted on having a dress after

her own fashion, and was excessively particular as to the fit and make. While it was being made up Martha called twice to see that it fitted exactly, and each time suggested some alteration. At last it was completed and sent home, and, to do Martha justice, although it might have differed somewhat from the reigning fashion of the day, it was far from being inelegant, or too Quaker-like. On the whole, she looked remarkably well in it, and received not only the conventional compliments of the dressmaker, but the more honest ones of Mrs. Keats and Fanny.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEDDING.

IT wanted but a week of the day fixed for the wedding, when Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury, to the great joy of all parties, arrived in England. Fortunately for Martha's peace of mind, Mr. Keats had an interview with her brother before she saw him. He listened with great attention to the description of Martha's behaviour to Morecombe, and the reason she had assisted him in escaping from the hands of justice.

"That fellow seems to have been a consummate villain," said Mr. Thornbury; "and it is something to know that the assistance Martha gave him did not profit him much. However, he is dead and gone, and we will say no more about him. But you really astonish me with regard to my sister. I had imagined that she was actuated in keeping the secret by some mawkish sentimentality, and was exceedingly indignant, as I wrote to her, for indulging in any

feeling of the kind. Of course I could never have guessed the sentiment which really actuated her, though I did not for one instant believe she was, even in the most remote manner, mixed up with the villains. You tell me," continued Mr. Thornbury, "that almost all her friends, labouring under the suspicion that there had been something almost criminal in her behaviour, avoided her; how did she put up with the slights she received?"

"With wonderful patience and resignation, evidently upheld by the conviction that she was acting an honourable and justifiable part," replied Mr. Keats. "At last, however, it became more than even her gentle spirit could support; and her health beginning to fail, she determined to seek change of air to benefit her if possible. She selected Ventnor, in the Isle of Wight, as her place of residence, and remained there for seven or eight months, corresponding the while with Mr. Gregory on events which took place at the Red House. At length her health became so unsatisfactory that the doctor at Ventnor advised her going to London, and placing herself under the care of an eminent physician whom he named to her. This gentleman appears to have done her but little good,

and she lingered on much in the same state, till one morning she received a letter from Mr. Morecombe, informing her that he was a patient at St. Thomas's Hospital, that there were no hopes of his recovery, and earnestly imploring her to visit him. She did so, and then wrote to me to come to town and see her. I immediately left X——, and received from her own lips an account, not only of what she had done, but her motives for the course she had adopted, and requesting my advice upon the steps she ought to take. I must say that I believe her conduct throughout to have been noble in the extreme."

"Noble, indeed," said Mr. Thornbury. "But what steps did you take after you received her communication?"

"Of course I immediately visited the wretched man, who implored me to obtain for him his son's pardon, that he might die in peace. Walter saw him, and a day or two afterwards he breathed his last."

"Well," said Mr. Thornbury, "I always had a great love for my dear sister; but it is more deeply rooted now than ever. But tell me, Mr. Keats, what became of the other scoundrel who was an accomplice in the attempted murder?

I think you told me it was believed he was a railway excavator, with whom Morecombe was in league."

"I believe there is no doubt on the subject," replied Mr. Keats. "A ten-pound note which your sister had given to Mr. Morecombe was found in his possession. The police, however, lost sight of him, as he quitted the gang of navvies with whom he had been working, and went to some other part of the kingdom. Nor do I think it would have been of much use had he been arrested, especially as Mr. Morecombe was safely away."

"After all," said Mr. Thornbury, "it is a fortunate thing they did not succeed in finding him, as it might have given rise to a very unpleasant family scandal. As it is, all seems to have ended for the best. But now I should like to visit Martha and Mrs. Keats. My wife has already gone there, and will await my arrival. If you have nothing to do, let us go together."

Mr. Keats readily agreed to accompany him, and a cab being ordered, they started off to the Regent's Park. Mrs. Keats, on hearing from Mrs. Thornbury that they might be shortly expected, had the good taste to arrange matters in such a manner that the brother and sister

should meet without witnesses. When the cab drew up at the door, Mrs. Keats went rapidly downstairs, and telling her husband to go into the drawing-room, she introduced Mr. Thornbury into the parlour, where he found Martha by herself, It need hardly be said that the meeting between the brother and sister was a most affectionate one. For some time both were so overcome that neither could speak a word. Edgar was the first to recover himself. Holding Martha a short distance from him, and looking at her attentively, he said,

"After all, Martha, you are a good old soul, and you have had much to put up with. But I trust better times are in store for you, and it shall be no fault of mine if the remainder of your life is not a happy one, for richly you deserve it should be. And now, tell me, are you quite recovered from your illness?"

"Quite," said Martha. "I never was better in my life, although about four or five weeks since I thought there was no hope for me in this world. However, thank God, I have been spared, and grateful indeed am I for His mercies, and among them—and by no means the least—that of being able to meet you again, my dear brother."

"Well, well, Martha," said Edgar Thornbury,

"we shall see each other, I trust, often enough for the future, till death us do part, as the marriage ceremony says. I have arranged everything in India, and placed our nephew Edgar at the head of the concern. Walter will have the business here, and I shall live at the Red House, and become an old-fashioned country squire. As for you, Martha, you may do as you please, either live with me or with Walter, or, in fact, wherever you like best. One of the first things I shall do is to make an ample settlement on you, so that you may be absolutely your own mistress. But now come upstairs, for I want to see Fanny and Mrs. Keats."

Mr. Thornbury and his sister now entered the drawing-room, where they found the rest of the party anxiously awaiting them. After the first warmth of the meeting was over, and the subjects of ordinary conversation respecting the voyage from India, and other matters, were exhausted, Edgar said to them,

"And now, I think we should determine what reason to give our friends, and the world at large, for suddenly ceasing our efforts to arrest the man who attempted to murder Walter. I think perhaps the better way would be to request the Inspector of Police to take no further

trouble on the subject, although very possibly he has already become convinced of the inutility of pursuing the matter further. Of course we must keep as secret as possible the relationship existing between Mr. Morecombe and Walter. It is generally supposed that not more than two persons can keep a secret, but I hardly agree to that, especially as in the present case every individual amongst us is personally interested that it should not be disclosed. It is a sort of family skeleton, which should be securely locked up in a cupboard, and the key thrown into the sea. But now comes the most difficult part of the affair,—how shall we manage as regards Martha? It is no use disguising the fact that, from her apparent mysterious behaviour, certain unpleasant suspicions have been spread abroad, and we must endeavour, if possible, to neutralize them, and quickly, too. What steps had we better take in the matter?"

"Well," said Mr. Keats, "I think the less said about it the better. When Miss Thornbury returns to X——, or the Red House, we will all show her the greatest friendship and attention. This will soon have the effect of puzzling the over-curious, and at the same time destroying the idea among others that the slightest ini-

mical feeling existed in the members of her own family. It may cause a little astonishment at first, but gradually the whole affair will die away like a nine days' wonder."

"Perhaps you are right," said Mr. Thornbury. "But there now remains the question whether we shall let anyone else into our family secret. In the first place, does Dr. Wilson know anything about it?"

"He does," said Mr. Keats—"at least, so far as to be aware that the would-be assassin was Walter's own father. What other conclusion he has arrived at, I know not; but most probably he guesses that Miss Thornbury has been trying to keep the affair secret. Of Wilson's discretion you need be in no fear, and Miss Thornbury is too great a favourite of his to allow him to hear a remark prejudicial to her without contradicting it."

"There now remains Mr. Gregory and the Inspector of Police to be spoken of," said Mr. Thornbury.

"With regard to Mr. Gregory, you may use your own discretion. Of course a secret of the kind in the breast of an old family solicitor would be perfectly safe. As to the Inspector, give him the fee you promised for himself, and

request him to ask no further questions on the subject, and you need be under no uneasiness about him. I think, now, that is all; and if the members of my own family question me, I shall soon put a stop to their curiosity."

In the evening, Walter joined the party in the Regent's Park, when the arrangements to be made for the approaching wedding formed the chief topic of conversation. Both Mrs. Thornbury and Mrs. Keats wished it to take place at X——, but this was overruled by Mr. Thornbury, who was very decided about its taking place in London. He told them his nephew's firm at that moment were engaged in business of great importance, and that, while the young people were on their wedding trip, he would be obliged to take the superintendence of the office himself. It was imperative, he said, that he should visit the Red House for a few days, and that Walter, during the time, must remain in town—in fact, one or other of them ought not to be absent even for a day. He therefore urged the necessity of the marriage taking place in London. Mr. Keats, although he would have preferred to have it in the country, admitted the force of Mr. Thornbury's reasoning, and it was finally decided that it should come off in London.

The next morning Mr. Thornbury left London for X——. On his arrival, his first visit was to Mr. Gregory, and to him he explained everything that had taken place, and his wish that as little as possible for the future should be said about the attack on Walter, as it would be a source of great pain if any suspicion continued to hang over the head of his sister.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Gregory, "I think you need hardly trouble yourself about it. The excitement which formerly existed on the subject has now almost entirely died away."

"At the same time," said Mr. Thornbury, "it might be again resuscitated when my sister revisits X——. Indeed, I do not mind mentioning to you that so much do I dread lest her presence might again open the matter, that I was obliged to invent some clumsy excuse to the Keats family for the marriage between my nephew and Miss Keats taking place in London."

"I am very sorry to hear that," said Mr. Gregory, "for I should much like to witness the ceremony."

"And there is no earthly reason why you should not," said Mr. Thornbury. "On the contrary, if you will come up to London at the time, we shall be delighted to see you. But

now, to return to my sister. In case anything should be said about her mysterious behaviour, we must have some excuse handy, so as to turn the thoughts of inquirers into another direction. I think we might state, and certainly with a considerable amount of truth in it, that her reason for not assisting the Inspector of Police arose from a sort of old maid-like, morbid feeling that she did not like getting a fellow-creature into trouble. Although possibly the idea might not hold water in the minds of either an old lawyer like yourself, or the Inspector of Police, it may not be without its effect on the minds of others less shrewd and observant, and there is really a great deal of truth in the statement."

"I think the idea an excellent one," said Mr. Gregory. "I will give what publicity I can to it; but I think you had better go yourself to the Inspector, and speak to him on the subject."

"Will you come with me, then, Mr. Gregory? To tell you the truth, I am rather afraid of him."

"How so?"

"That he may see through the clumsy excuse for my sister's behaviour that I shall offer him."

"Oh! I will go with you with pleasure," said Mr. Gregory, "but you need not be afraid of the Inspector, I feel sure. He is a very shrewd, intelligent fellow, and will look no deeper into the affair than is wanted, especially where his own interest is concerned in remaining inactive —always, be it understood, when it interferes with no part of his duty; for there, I believe, nothing would induce him to act in an illegal manner."

Mr. Gregory and Mr. Thornbury now bent their steps to the police-station, and were shortly afterwards closeted with the Inspector.

"Mr. Thornbury, you see, has arrived in England," said Mr. Gregory, "and one of his first visits is to you. I have already told him that we have met with no decided success in our investigations, and that we have almost entirely abandoned any further attempts to discover the culprits who attempted the murder of his nephew. Mr. Thornbury now wishes all efforts entirely to cease, and will, of course, reimburse you the expenses your men have been put to."

"Not only that," said Mr. Thornbury; "but I must insist on your accepting a cheque for the personal reward I offered to give you in case you succeeded, for I am fully persuaded the

failure has not been occasioned by either want of ability or energy on your part. If you will give me a pen and ink I will at once write you a cheque for the amount."

The habitually cold grey eye of the Inspector lighted up with pleasure at Mr. Thornbury's words. He was profuse in his expressions of gratitude, and even went so far as to mention a doubt whether in conscience he ought to take so munificent a reward.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Thornbury, as he presented him with the cheque, "make your conscience perfectly easy on that score. I should not have given you the money had I not thought you richly deserved it."

After the Inspector had placed the cheque in his pocket-book, Mr. Gregory said to him,

"And now we wish you to assist us in another way. Without going at any length into the subject, you know the unpleasant suspicions which have attached themselves to Miss Thornbury. Now, in case you hear any one speak of it again, will you oblige me by giving out that it has been discovered, in her refusal to assist you in your researches she was actuated by an old maid-like morbid feeling of compassion for the wrong-doers."

The Inspector of Police bowed, and said Mr. Thornbury might depend upon it that as far as lay in his power such an impression should be spread abroad.

"But let us clearly understand each other," said Mr. Gregory; "do not imagine that this is simply an excuse, because I give you my word of honour, and Mr. Thornbury, I am sure, will pledge his with mine, that, although we do not wish to go into any particulars, Miss Thornbury was actuated solely by a feeling of the kind."

Without appearing in the slightest manner to doubt Mr. Gregory's word, the Inspector seemed somewhat surprised. However, he again assured Mr. Thornbury he would endeavour to spread abroad the report as far as possible, whenever he heard any person speak on the subject.

In the afternoon Mr. Thornbury, accompanied by Mr. Gregory, went to the Red House, where they found everything in perfect order.

"My sister tells me, Mr. Gregory, that for many months past you have taken the superintendence of affairs at the Red House. Well, certainly they do you credit, for everything seems in admirable condition. I shall remain here till the day before the wedding, and then I hope you and

Wilson will accompany me to London, where you will remain my guests till the ceremony is over. I have not yet spoken to Wilson on the subject; but I intend driving over to X—— to-morrow to see him. If you should meet him in the meantime, tell him I will call at his house about the middle of the day, and should like to have some conversation with him."

Mr. Gregory promised he would do so, and shortly afterwards took his leave.

The next day Mr. Thornbury fulfilled his intention of calling on Dr. Wilson, who appeared delighted to see his old friend again.

"I have called on you to-day," said Mr. Thornbury, "for a double purpose. The first is to ask if you will accompany me to town the day before the wedding, and be present at the ceremony, which is to take place there. Gregory has already promised to do so, and I should much like you to accompany us; and you must remain my guests till you return. I would ask Mrs. Wilson, but I know she has her young family to attend to, and I hardly know what accommodation we could offer her, as in Walter's house at Kensington there are no servants, and our own in the Regent's Park will be fully occupied. Now give me your answer,

and then I will speak upon the other subject."

"I will accompany you with great pleasure," replied Dr. Wilson. "I feel a great interest in my patient Walter, and, to tell you the truth, I am not without some pride in the cure I effected in his case. And, now, what other matter have you to speak to me upon, for, without wishing to appear inhospitable, I have an operation to perform this afternoon, and the time for it is fast approaching."

"The other subject I wish to speak to you about," replied Mr. Thornbury, "is the state of health of my sister Martha. She appears to me to be exceedingly delicate, although I am told she has wonderfully improved in health since you went up to London to see her. You don't think she is consumptive, do you?"

"No, I do not," said Dr. Wilson.

"Then from what disease was she suffering when you saw her in town?"

"Well, that is a difficult question for me to answer," said Dr. Wilson, after a moment's silence. "Her lungs are perfectly healthy; nor do I think she has any constitutional infirmity whatever. And yet she was as near death when I went up to London as she was some time since, when I found her in a dying

condition at the Red House. But now you must excuse me, I am getting behind my time. I will most willingly accompany you to London, and shall be delighted to be present at the wedding." Dr. Wilson then bade his friend goodbye, and Mr. Thornbury returned to the Red House.

The day before the wedding was to take place, Mr. Thornbury, accompanied by Mr. Gregory and Dr. Wilson, left X——, and arrived early in the afternoon at the house in the Regent's Park. Here they found the whole family in a state of high excitement, making preparations for the next day. To such an extent was it carried, that even Mrs. Thornbury seemed to have thrown off her habitual impassivity, and was as active as the rest. Milliners were incessantly arriving; and Mrs. Keats and Fanny were continually holding whispered conversations, in which they were frequently joined by the two younger sisters of Fanny, who were to act as bridesmaids, and had come up to town a few days previously. Then, leaving the room, their voices were heard in conversation with tradespeople, who were evidently making preparations, and taking orders for the wedding breakfast. Then again, Fanny's maid, as well

as a woman from the milliner's, were engaged in another part of the house, packing in trunks and portmanteaus the articles requisite for their journey, for the young couple intended spending the honeymoon in Switzerland. In fact, so busy were the whole female portion of the establishment, that Mr. Keats was obliged to receive the three gentlemen on their arrival, and entertain them till dinner time, when they were joined by the ladies of the family.

When dinner was over, Mr. Thornbury contrived to gain some information as to what had taken place during his absence, the arrangements which were to be made for the next day, and how affairs were to be managed during the absence of Edgar and Fanny. Martha was the principal spokeswoman on the occasion, for although both Mrs. Keats and Mrs. Thornbury did condescend to make some remarks, they were continually breaking off to converse together on subjects hardly understood by the gentlemen present, and in which they were certainly not interested. Martha now explained to her brother that, a day or two after the wedding, they would give up the house in the Regent's Park, and that she and Mrs. Keats would take possession of Walter's residence in

Kensington. That they had already contrived to get two or three servants into the house, and they hoped, before Fanny returned from her wedding trip, the whole establishment would be complete, so that the house could be handed over to her in a satisfactory and working condition.

"And pray, Martha," said her brother, "where are Marguerite and I to reside during Walter's absence?"

"Of course with us," replied Martha, laughing. "We mean you to be our guests."

"Oh! very well, I have no objection to the arrangement whatever, and I am sure Marguerite has not, though she is too much engaged talking about bonnets to be aware of what is going on at this end of the table. I suppose everything is arranged for to-morrow—carriages ordered, breakfast prepared, and everything else necessary for the occasion?"

"Everything, my dear brother," replied Martha. "You need not give yourself the slightest trouble or anxiety about it, for you will find that all will go on smoothly and regularly. And now you must excuse me, for we have a deal to do upstairs, so much indeed, that I am afraid we shall hardly be able to join you this evening. There is a whist-table prepared

for you in the drawing-room, and I have no doubt you will enjoy yourselves without us, and Walter can amuse himself with the books."

So saying, Martha cast on him a somewhat arch glance, and left the room.

The next morning, on rising, to Martha's great delight, she found the sky without a cloud. She was one of those who had some faith in the old superstition, that if the sun was shining upon a young betrothed couple as they entered the church, it was an augury that the union would be a happy one. Of course none of the ladies made their appearance at the breakfast-table, all were too much occupied in making preparations for the ceremony. At what hour Fanny commenced her toilette it would be difficult to say, possibly before daylight. As soon as Mr. Thornbury and his guests had finished breakfast, he, accompanied by Mr. Gregory and the doctor, went to Walter's lodgings, to escort him to the church. Although they arrived at least three quarters of an hour before it was time for them to start, they found him already dressed; and a remarkably handsome young fellow he looked, and the more so, possibly, from being unconscious of the fact himself. So impatient was he to leave the house, that by way

of humouring him, they entered the carriage as soon as it arrived at the door.

Of the imposing appearance the party made when ranged before the altar, the interesting appearance of the bride, the painful emotions of her father and mother, the demeanour of the bridesmaids, and the splendid dresses of the ladies, we will not detain the reader, for he may read a description of what might pass for the present wedding in any of the fashionable novels of the present day. Suffice it to say, if the present ceremony did not exceed in brilliancy of appearance many that have been already described, it was certainly inferior to few, and the crowd which had collected outside the church, to see the party as they left the building, by the glances of admiration they cast, not only on the bride and bridegroom, but on all the guests, fully testified that the statement is not an exaggerated one.

On the party arriving at the house, and before entering the breakfast-room, Mr. Thornbury presented Fanny with the diamond bracelet he had purchased for her, and, on the part of Walter's brother, then in Calcutta, a diamond brooch, which was perfectly in keeping with it. Mrs. Thornbury also gave Fanny the cashmere

shawl already spoken of, and Martha presented her with a beautiful emerald ring. After the presents had been sufficiently examined and admired, breakfast was announced to be ready, and the guests seated themselves at the table.

We will also spare the reader the detail of events which took place at the breakfast-table. They resembled so completely what takes place on all similar occasions in good society, that it would be merely to repeat what everyone has seen, heard, or read of, over and over again. There were the same speeches, the same toasts, the same wedding cake and champagne, the same modest demeanour of the bride, and the same bashful expression of thanks for the honour done them in drinking their health by the bridegroom. The breakfast was at last over. The bride quitted the table to change her dress, preparatory to starting on her journey, and the travelling carriage drew up to the door. When all was in readiness for their departure, the guests crowded round the young couple, wishing them every happiness, and accompanying them to the door. Walter and his young bride then entered the carriage, and started for their wedding trip on the Continent.

CHAPTER XII.

EXIT BILL SMITHERS.—CONCLUSION.

THE honeymoon over, Walter Thornbury and his wife returned to London. They received a warm welcome from Martha and Mrs. Keats, for although Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury had remained at Kensington during the whole of the time, the two former ladies seemed to have taken so completely possession of the house, that Edgar and his wife were but as guests in it. The morning after her arrival, Fanny was conducted by her mother and Martha over the house, who explained to her the arrangements they had made, introduced her to the servants, informed her the best tradesmen in the neighbourhood, and, in fact, so completely initiated her into the details of the establishment, that at last Fanny felt herself able without further trouble to take her place as its mistress. Walter accompanied his uncle to the office, where they were closeted together

during the greater part of the day, Mr. Thornbury explaining to his nephew what had taken place during his absence.

"And now, my dear boy," he said, when he had finished, "I think for the future you and your brother will be able to go on satisfactorily without any further assistance from me. Should you, however, require my advice, you have but to drop me a line to the Red House, and the next morning you will infallibly see me in town."

"But, uncle," said Walter, "I hope you and my aunt do not think of leaving us just yet. Why, we have seen nothing of you since your return from India, and it is very hard to quit us so soon after our arrival home."

"I am very much obliged to you, my dear boy, for your kind wishes, but both your aunt and myself are anxious to get back to the Red House. Possibly your aunt Martha may like to remain a little longer with you, but on that subject I suppose she has only to please herself, and you will readily meet her wishes, whatever they may be."

"Of that you may be certain," said Walter. "But apart from any other consideration, in a business point of view, I think it is better for you to remain in town a little longer, not

only to give me your advice, but that you may explain to me circumstances which have taken place in India during your stay there, and which probably may have slipped your memory."

"Well, there is some reason in that, Walter," said his uncle, "and I will delay our departure till the day after to-morrow—not an hour longer. That will be ample time for everything, for to-day, after dinner, as no other gentleman will be present, I may mention anything that occurs to me which I had perhaps forgotten, and to-morrow I will again accompany you to the office. It, after my arrival at the Red House, I should remember anything else, I will write to you on the subject."

In the evening, when they met in the drawing-room, Mr. Thornbury told them of his determination to quit London in two days' time with Mrs. Thornbury. With regard to his sister, he said she could stay longer if she pleased, that was to say if Fanny were willing to receive her. Fanny of course expressed herself most pleased if she would do so, but Martha had too much tact to accept the invitation, judging—and rightly too—that it would be much better for the young housekeeper, for some time, at any rate, to play undisturbedly the mistress of her

own house, but she promised she would pay her a visit on some future occasion. Mrs. Keats also took Martha's view of the case, and proposed leaving London with Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury. Walter and his wife endeavoured to induce them to change their resolution, but all in vain, and at last it was definitely arranged they should start on the day appointed. When the morning came for them to leave London, Fanny and her husband accompanied them to the railway station, and after an affectionate leave-taking, the train started for X——, and the newly-married pair returned to their own house.

Here, as the principal events connected with the history of our heroine and her family are over, we will take leave of them. Little more need be said, than that the two brothers conduct their extensive business as merchants with great success, and are much respected and honoured by all who know them. Mr. Thornbury soon fell into the comfortable and regular life of a wealthy country squire, became a Justice of the Peace, attended Quarter Sessions, and was even invited to become a Member of Parliament for his division of the county. This, however, he refused, urging as an excuse that he was now getting somewhat into the vale of

years, and that the arduous duties of an M.P. were better fitted for younger men. Mrs. Thornbury, singular to relate, as she grew older, gradually threw off a considerable portion of Oriental inactivity, and became highly interested in the village schools, as well as different charitable works in the neighbourhood. With Mr. Keats and his family time rolls quietly and placidly on. Another daughter has married an officer in the army, somewhat against her father's inclination, as his regiment was at the time stationed in India. When the match was proposed to him, he at first objected to it on that account, and it was for the time broken off; but the effect of her disappointment became so marked on the poor girl, that Mr. Keats was obliged to rescind his determination. The young couple were afterwards married, and are now residing in India. Of the doctor and the Inspector of Police there is nothing to remark, beyond that the latter still holds his appointment, and the former is as busily engaged and as much respected as ever by all the inhabitants of X——.

In the regular order of things, perhaps the termination of the career of Mr. Bill Smithers ought already to have been mentioned, for it

took place scarcely two months after the attempted murder of Walter Thornbury. The reader is aware that a ten-pound note, which Martha had given to Morecombe was traced to the possession of Bill Smithers. The morning following the atrocious attempt at murder, he had quitted the neighbourhood of the Red House, and joined his wife and little girl at a village some distance off, where he had told them to wait for him. On his arrival he amused himself by getting drunk for several successive days, and on one occasion nearly succeeded in murdering his wife. In fact, so great was the danger she was in, that the ruffian himself began to be greatly alarmed, not out of sympathy for the poor woman, but from fear of the punishment which might await him in case of her death. His fear had the effect of keeping him sober for several days, and during the time he began to feel considerable uneasiness lest he might be suspected of being implicated in the attack on Walter, especially as he found that inquiries had been made respecting the ten-pound note given him by Morecombe for the part he had taken in the affair. His wife having now sufficiently recovered from the injuries she had received, he one night quitted the village

with her and the child, without giving warning to any one, or informing them to what part of the country he was going.

Smithers had still a few pounds left out of the money he had received, which was ample to support them for some days on their road, especially as he now saw the necessity of keeping sober. He had determined to seek for work on a railway which was then being made near Maidstone in Kent, rightly considering that there he should be out of reach of his old associates, and where he would be unknown to any one. His first effort of course was to reach London; and then after leaving his wife and little daughter there, he intended to proceed to Maidstone, and if he succeeded in finding work, of which he had very little doubt, he would send for them to join him.

But they were still between eighty and ninety miles from London, and how to get there and elude the police, who, he had an instinctive idea, were upon his track, caused him some anxiety. After reflecting somewhat deeply for him on the matter, he came to the conclusion that it would be imprudent to go by train, as there he might meet with some of his associates, who would probably give the police information

respecting him. He at length resolved to make the journey on foot, and packing up his own wardrobe in a sort of woollen bag, which he slung over one shoulder, with his pickaxe and spade on the other, and his wife, carrying her own and the child's clothes, they proceeded leisurely on their road till they arrived within two days' journey of London, without anything occurring worthy of particular remark. A change then took place in the weather. From being fine and genial, it became rugged, cold, and stormy, with violent showers of rain; and the result was, that when they stopped at some lodgings in the evening, they were so thoroughly drenched, that the water fairly poured off them. To counteract the unpleasant effects of the weather, Bill Smithers that night got conscientiously drunk; and by way of warding off all ill effects from his little girl, notwithstanding the efforts of his wife to prevent it, insisted on her swallowing so much spirit that the poor child was at length scarcely less inebriated than her father. The mother, who alone of the party was sober, was awarded by her husband a sound beating for her interference, which would have been still more severe, had

not the people of the house come forward to protect her.

The following day the weather still continued unfavourable, but Bill insisted on their pursuing their journey to London. In vain did the poor woman remonstrate, saying that their little girl was exceedingly ill from exposure to the weather the day before, and she might have added, had she not been afraid, from the quantity of spirit, also, which had been given her. The man would not, however, listen to reason, and insisted on their starting off. The same evening they reached London, and found a lodging in some obscure alley at Rotherhithe where Smithers intended to leave his wife and child and go by himself to find work on the railway. The next morning the child was found to be exceedingly ill, and her father, who possessed but one feeling that raised him above the level of the brute creation, love for his child, became alarmed, and put off his journey to Maidstone for another day. His wife proposed that they should send for a medical man, but Bill replied, with an oath, that he would have "no d——d tinkering doctors there. He knew as much about the complaint, he said, as they did. Whenever he was ill, and

he was ill very often, he found a quartern of rum mixed with pepper do him a great deal of good. He'd try the same physic with Poppet, and he was sure she would be quite well the next day." His wife, however, who, like most women, had instinctively some crude knowledge of medicine, set herself against the treatment, and said she would not allow it, while Bill, cursing her soundly, declared he would be obeyed, and then left the house in a towering passion.

His wife was now joined by a lodger from the upper floor, and to her the poor woman narrated the absurd conduct of her husband.

"Well, but, my dear," said the other one, "why don't you send for a doctor at once, now he's gone out."

"I will presently," said the mother, "if he don't come back. I suspect he's gone to the public house, and as he seemed somewhat low-spirited, I don't think he'll come back till he's drunk. I'd better wait a little while in case he returns, though I don't think there's any chance of it."

She had hardly concluded her remark when Bill Smithers entered, with a cup in his hand, containing the rum and pepper which he had proposed to give to the child.

"What have you got there?" said his wife to him, in a far more determined tone than she was generally accustomed to use when addressing her husband.

"That's my affair," he replied; "stand out of my way."

The woman, now roused to desperation at the danger her child was in, without saying another word, flew at her husband, and before he was aware of her intention, dashed the cup out of his hand. Thoroughly enraged, he turned to his wife, and made a furious attack on her, while she and the woman who was still in the room with her screamed loudly for help. Others soon came to their assistance, and assailed Smithers with such a volley of abuse that he was fain to leave the house; and his movements were still more accelerated by hearing that one of the women had gone for a policeman.

Mrs. Smithers, now being fairly rid of her husband, sent for a doctor, who, having pronounced the child to be in a high state of fever, prescribed for her, and then left. In the evening Bill returned, and, to the astonishment of his wife, was not only sober, but had brought with him some half a dozen tawdry cheap toys for the child's amusement. Having advanced to-

wards her, he placed the toys on the counterpane, when the child looked at him gratefully for a moment, and taking one or two in her hand, seemed much pleased with them. Bill offered her another, and the child took it from him; but after gazing at it for a moment, she placed it on the bed, and turning away from her father with a listless, wearied look, laid her head on the pillow. Something like an expression of alarm and sorrow for a moment passed over the man's countenance, but the next he turned round and cast a ferocious glance on his wife, as if she had been to blame in the matter. She made no remark; and his eye again fell upon the child. Then suddenly, as if acted upon by an impulse he was unable to control, he started from his seat on the bed, and, seizing his hat, rushed out of the house. It was some hours before he returned, and then he was stupidly intoxicated.

The next morning delirium set in, and the child was evidently in a desperate condition. Her father, as soon as he had risen, gazed at her for some time with an expression of terror, but without saying a word. He noticed the change which had taken place in the child during the night, and seemed to realize the fact

that the seal of death was already on her face. After gazing at her for some few minutes, his eye fell on a phial which stood on the chimney-piece, containing a portion of the medicine the doctor had ordered. As soon as Bill saw it, he shook his huge fist at his wife, and pointing to the phial with the other hand, said to her, with an oath,

"That has done it. If anything happens to my child, I'll murder you for it;" and possibly he would have attempted to put his threat into execution at that moment, had it not been that two other women were in the room at the time, and he restrained himself.

Several times during the day the ruffian returned to the house, and each time found the child worse. The sight of her sufferings appeared too painful for him to witness, and he stayed but a short time when he came. In the evening, when he entered, he was sober, and pushing through the group of women who were assembled round the bed, saw that his child was dying. He stood for a moment gazing at her, till her respiration ceased, and the light blue tinge of death spread over her features. Then, with a roar like that of some wild animal, he flung himself upon the bed, and for some time

sobbed like a child. After a short time he suddenly rose, and pushed through the women, saying, "Curse you all! get out of my way!" and then rushed out of the house.

Neither that night, the following day, nor the day afterwards, did Bill Smithers return home. A man in the dress of an excavator then called at the house, and asked Mrs. Smithers when the funeral was to take place, as her husband wanted to know. He was told by her that they would leave for the cemetery about noon the next day, and if her husband intended to follow the corpse, he must be at the house punctually by that time. On the morrow, Bill, in company with two navvies, reached the house a few minutes before the funeral was to leave it. There was no appearance of sorrow on his countenance; but he had evidently been drinking, though not to the extent of being in the least degree intoxicated. He followed the coffin, walking by the side of his wife, his two friends bringing up the rear. On the road he spoke not a word, and his features wore a sullen, dogged expression. Occasionally he glanced round with a savage look, as if it would have pleased him had anyone offered him a provocation. When by the grave, there was no-

thing for some time to be objected to in his behaviour; but when the minister came to the words "dust to dust, ashes to ashes," and the hollow sound of the earth falling on the coffin was heard, it seemed to have a singular effect on him. Turning round, and gazing at the sun which was shining in a cloudless sky, he shook his fist at it, and as if he were addressing the Deity, uttered a volley of blasphemy that shocked all who heard it. His wife, placing her hand over his mouth, begged him to be silent. and one of his friends said to the clergyman, who stood aghast at such behaviour,

"Oh! please, sir, go on. Don't mind him, he hasn't got his head right, and he don't know what he's saying. You go on, sir."

During the remainder of the service, Smithers remained quiet; but on quitting the grave, and returning to the entrance gates, he suddenly stopped, and again raising his fist at the sun, repeated the blasphemy he had uttered before, when standing by the grave. His wife, horrified at his conduct, begged him to leave off.

"What did He rob me of my child for, then?" he exclaimed. "I did nothing to Him."

"Oh! Bill," she said, "don't talk so, God had a right to take her if he pleased."

"Come along, Bill, and don't make a fool of yourself," said one of the excavators; and the party then lounged on till they arrived at the entrance gates of the cemetery.

Bill Smithers and his two companions entered the first public-house they came to, and the poor woman continued her path homewards by herself.

It was late at night before Bill reached the house; and when he did so, without speaking to his wife, dressed as he was, he threw himself on the bed, and was soon fast asleep. He was still in the same silent mood when he awoke next morning, and during the time of his breakfast spoke not one word to his wife. After he had finished his meal, he left the house for a few minutes, but shortly returned, bringing with him a child's little wicker-basket. He then collected the toys which he had purchased for her just before her death, and placing them in the basket, he covered it with some brown paper, and fastened it with a piece of spun yarn. He then hung the basket by its handle on a nail in the ceiling, nearly over the fireplace. He next dressed himself as if going on a journey, and when ready to leave the house, he took his wife by the arm, and pointing to the little basket, said to her,

"D'ye see that? You only touch that before I come back, or let anyone else, and I'll murder you; now, d'ye hear?"

"Yes, Bill, nobody shall touch it."

"They'd better not, nor you neither," said he, shaking his fist at her. "If you do, look out, that's all."

Bill Smithers, as he had anticipated, soon succeeded in finding work on the railway in course of construction near Maidstone. He worked on steadily for some weeks, generally maintaining a sullen silence, unless in the evening, when he visited the beer-house, and became somewhat elated by drink. He was then so often disposed to be quarrelsome, as to excite great dislike against him among his fellow-workmen.

One evening, when he appeared in a little better humour than usual, one of them said to him,

"By-the-bye, Bill, I was very sorry to hear of the death of that poor child of yours, very."

Bill started from his seat, and with passion stamped on all his features, said to the man, with an oath,

"What d'ye speak of her for?" Then seizing a pewter pot, out of which he had been drinking, he hurled it at the other with so much

force that when it struck the wall (for fortunately it missed the man) it fell to the ground completely flattened.

A great uproar now ensued in the tap-room, all present being indignant with Smithers for his brutal behaviour. They insisted on his leaving the works the next day; and although he attempted to resist their decision, they would not give way, and he returned to his wife in London. The morning after his arrival he rose somewhat later than usual, and appeared in a very good temper. He spoke to his wife with considerable civility as she prepared his breakfast. When he had finished his meal, and after the things were cleared away, Mrs. Smithers put on her bonnet and shawl preparatory to going out. Her husband asked her whither she was going, to which she replied,

"I am going to the market to get something for your dinner, Bill; for if I don't you'll have to go without, and that won't please you, I suspect."

"Stop a moment, old woman," said Bill, "while I put on my boots, and then I'll go with you."

His wife, of course, assented, and Bill, rising from his chair, went to a sort of shed or lean-to

at the back of the house, to get his boots, and his wife the while seated herself in his place. After waiting for more than a quarter of an hour, she began to be curious to know the reason of his delay; and leaving the room, she proceeded to the outhouse to find her husband. Before she had reached it, however, the poor woman gave a loud scream, and fell senseless on the ground. An upstair lodger came to her assistance, and then saw that Smithers had hung himself to the rafters of the outhouse. She soon summoned others, and the wretched man was cut down, when life was found to be extinct. Villain as he was, he appears never to have recovered his grief for the loss of his child. At length, notwithstanding his brutal nature, it became too insupportable for him to bear, and he put an end to his life.

We have now merely to speak of Martha, and so equably did the course of her life run after the marriage of her nephew, that there is no circumstance connected with it worthy of particular notice. As had been prognosticated by Mr. Gregory and Mr. Keats, the suspicion which had been aroused against her gradually subsided, and she entered again into the good opinion of all. Her time was equally divided between the

Red House and Kensington, where she frequently stayed with Walter and his wife. To say the truth, the latter place gives her ample occupation, for they have already a large family, and strong prospect of its increasing. At every fresh arrival Martha's services are especially called into requisition; for she has then to take under her charge at the Red House the greater portion of the children, who might be found in the way on such occasions. Nay, more, the Red House is generally used as a sanitorium whenever any of them are ill, Martha acting the part of head-nurse. By way of complimenting her, one of Walter's boys has been christened George, after her little brother who died in infancy, and two of the girls Martha and Charity. These, however, are only their second names, and they are generally called by the first, the boy having been christened Walter after his father, the elder girl Fanny after Mrs. Keats, and the other Marguerite after Mrs. Thornbury. Martha, although deeply grateful for the compliment paid to her, makes a point of calling the children by their first names. Her health is now completely restored, and she has acquired an amount of *embonpoint* which renders her of somewhat dignified appearance, and certainly improves her carriage.

She now takes but comparatively little interest in the charitable works of the neighbourhood, Mrs. Thornbury having taken these under her especial superintendence, while Martha confines herself chiefly to her nephew's children. She still retains her old bedroom in the Red House, and in it on her table are always to be seen old Deborah's Bible, and the prayer-book given her by her sister Charity.

It may here be stated that her sister's phantom has never visited her since Walter's wedding, and she has told Dr. Wilson when, speaking confidentially on the subject, that she attributes it to the happiness she is now enjoying, and her state of robust health. She tells him, also, that she is fully convinced that Charity will visit her again before she dies, and she will then stand by her bedside, waiting to receive her spirit when it quits the body. There is, however, little probability of an event of the kind soon occurring, and all who know Martha Thornbury hope it will be many years before she terminates her "life of love."

THE END.

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